

KAROL WALCZAK

 [HTTPS://ORCID.ORG/0000-0002-7367-778X](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7367-778X)

KAROL.WALCZAK@AMU.EDU.PL

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

Faculty of Pedagogy and Fine Arts in Kalisz

Department of Protection of Cultural Heritage and Intercultural Communication

## *There is no store in Tarda again...* Some remarks on the functioning of rural communities in south-western Mazury on the example of Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec

*W Tardzie znów nie ma sklepu...*

Kilka uwag na temat funkcjonowania  
wieskich społeczności w południowo-zachodnich Mazurach  
na przykładzie Bartężka, Tardy i Wińca

**Summary:** This article describes the economic and socio-cultural transformations experienced in recent decades by the communities of three villages, Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec, located in the western part of the Warmia-Mazury province. The immediate cause of these changes was the political and economic transformations that took place in Poland after 1989. However, the aftermath of the specific, and often predominantly negative, effects of these transformations are seen in the contemporary history of the region and its inhabitants; in particular, the challenge faced by the newly forming Polish state to domesticate, incorporate and unite – both administratively and economically, as well as (most importantly!) symbolically and culturally – the areas of the so-called Recovered Territories with the rest of the country. The great experiment, which was the formation of a new and modern society (in intention) of the Northern and Western Territories, was not successful everywhere. The localities and their inhabitants featured in the work are examples of this. Objective factors, mostly unemployment and transportation exclusion, which afflicted and partly continue to afflict the residents since the early 1990s, overlapped with the lack of sufficiently strong social and cultural ties binding the group together and with the inhabited space. The result of this process was a rapid exodus (if not flight) of primarily young people in search

of income and a new place to live. This exodus determined the social and cultural condition of the described villages today, and perhaps many similar ones in the region. The article, using ethnographic detail, reveals the backstage of the economic and social collapse of the villages mentioned and the communities that comprise them, and points to the socio-cultural and symbolic causes of this process.

**Keywords:** social crisis, cultural transformation, local community, private homeland, poverty, exclusion, stagnation

---

**Streszczenie:** Niniejszy artykuł opisuje ekonomiczne i społeczno-kulturowe przemiany, jakich doświadczyły w ostatnich dekadach społeczności trzech wsi: Bartężka, Tardy i Wińca, położonych w zachodniej części województwa warmińsko-mazurskiego. Bezpośrednią przyczynę owych przekształceń stanowiły transformacje polityczno-gospodarcze, jakie nastąpiły w Polsce po 1989 r. Specyficzne, a często w przeważającym stopniu negatywne, skutki tych przemian są jednak pokłosiem współczesnej historii tego regionu i jego mieszkańców; w szczególności wyzwania, jakie stanowiło dla nowo formującego się państwa polskiego oswojenie, włączenie i zespolenie, zarówno w wymiarze administracyjno-gospodarczym, jak i (co najistotniejsze!) symboliczno-kulturowym, terenów tzw. Ziemi Odzyskanych z resztą kraju. Wielki eksperyment, jakim była budowa nowego, w zamyśle nowoczesnego społeczeństwa Ziemi Północnych i Zachodnich, nie wszędzie się powiódł. Miejscowości i ich mieszkańcy, które zostały przedstawione w pracy, stanowią tego przykład. Czynniki obiektywne, w decydującym stopniu bezrobocie i wykluczenie komunikacyjne, które od początku lat 90. XX w. trapiły i częściowo nadal trapią mieszkańców, nałożyły się na brak dostatecznie silnych więzi społecznych i kulturowych spajających grupę pomiędzy jej członkami oraz z zamieszkiwaną przestrzenią. Efektem tego procesu był gwałtowny odpływ (jeśli nie ucieczka) przede wszystkim młodych ludzi w poszukiwaniu zarobku i nowego miejsca w życiu. Odpływ ten zadecydował o dzisiejszej kondycji społecznej i kulturowej opisanych miejscowości, jak i zapewne wielu im podobnych w tym regionie. Artykuł, posiłkując się etnograficznym detailem, odsłania kulisy ekonomiczno-społecznej zapaści wymienionych wiosek i tworzących je społeczności oraz wskazuje na społeczno-kulturowe i symboliczne przyczyny tego procesu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kryzys społeczny, transformacja kulturowa, społeczność lokalna, ojczyzna prywatna, ubóstwo, wykluczenie, stagnacja

## Introduction

In the following paper, I present and analyze the contemporary fate of three rural communities: Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec. These villages are located in the Mazury region, in the western part of the Warmia-Mazury province, the *powiat*

of Ostróda, the municipalities of Miłomłyn (Tarda and Winiec) and Moraż (Bartężek). I conducted field research in these villages between May 2001 and April 2004 for my doctoral dissertation.<sup>1</sup> After completing my research, I did not visit these places for almost two decades. I returned in the summer of 2021 and autumn of 2022.<sup>2</sup> Juxtaposing the observations made at that time with some of the conclusions and findings from 2001–2004 gave me a direct impetus to write the present text. A comparison of the situation in the villages in question (and the lives of its inhabitants) over the past two decades justifies using the term “stagnation.”

I assume that the contemporary socio-cultural image of the mentioned localities, as well as the economic and living conditions there, were most influenced by the consequences of the transformation in the political and economic system of the notable year 1989. Their impact could be characterized as direct. However, the peculiarities of the (often negative) changes that they caused in the discussed localities come from the unique history of these areas and the socio-cultural characteristics of the groups of newly arrived settlers after 1945. After all, Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec are located in the area of the so-called Recovered Territories, which were annexed to Poland after World War II as a result of the political settlements of the Yalta and Potsdam Conferences.

Before I proceed with a detailed description of the villages and the characteristics of their inhabitants, I will offer a few words of introduction to the historical and cultural context of this territory.

---

1 Poznań University Library, sygn. 1518569 III, K. Walczak, *Segmentaryzacja ubóstwa. Antropologiczne studium społeczności lokalnych w okresie regresu*, Poznań 2005, PhD thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Wojciech Burszta, k. 181, mpis.

2 The 2001–2004 field research was stationary. I visited the referenced localities more than a dozen times. Almost every time, the length of stay ranged from one to two weeks. I planned the visits so as to have the opportunity to observe the lives of the villagers in all seasons and to confront the seasonality of nature with the social life of the groups under study. After the initial period of “entering” the field, familiarizing the residents with the figure of the researcher, as well as myself with the role of a “real” ethnologist/anthropologist, I proceeded with the proper research. As for the methods of collecting the material, the premise was simple – to accompany, as far as possible, the surveyed people in their ordinary activities, observe their daily lives and, in the course of casual conversation, collect material. I did not use questionnaires or structured questions. I took notes on the spot or immediately after the survey, depending on the circumstances. The visits in 2021 and 2022 were decidedly shorter (lasting a few days). At that time, I did not live in the described localities. I spent several hours each day in them, observing and interviewing residents (including previous respondents). Conversations with employees of the Miłomłyn Town Hall and Municipality Office, and the manager of the local library also provided valuable insights.

## Historical and cultural characteristics of the Western and Northern Territories of Poland

The lands, which henceforth I will also refer to as the Western and Northern Territories, and which today constitute 32% of the country's area, were transferred to Poland as compensation for the Eastern Territories annexed by the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Such a significant shift of borders and change in the area of the country was combined with a massive exchange of population. The social and cultural processes taking place in these lands continue to be characterized by unprecedented complexity and intensity in Poland. Listing the sources of this phenomenon, in addition to the complicated political, economic and demographic situation, one should point to the role of culture clash, which is a consequence of the mingling of numerous population groups of different regional origins, national consciousness, diverse baggage of cultural and civilizational experience, and practicing different religions.

The cultural mosaic of the so-called Recovered Territories consisted of six major population groups:

1. The people who had inhabited these areas before 1945: Germans, as well as Mazurians, Warmians, Kashubians, Slovincians and Silesians (often referred to as autochthons);
2. Resettlers (settlers), the largest and most internally diverse group, consisted of settlers from almost all regions of Poland;
3. Displaced persons from the Eastern Territories of the Second Polish Republic (repatriates);
4. Re-emigrants from France, Belgium, Romania, Yugoslavia and other European countries;
5. Ukrainians and representatives of other national minorities residing in the Polish state before 1939. This includes representatives of the Ukrainian and Lemko populations who were forcibly settled in the territories of the Western and Northern Territories as part of "Operation Vistula," which lasted from May 4 to July 31, 1947;
6. A group of Soviet servicemen stationed with their families in Poland between 1945 and 1991.<sup>4</sup>

---

3 In total, Poland lost 75,861 km<sup>2</sup>: the loss to its eastern neighbor amounted to 179,645 km<sup>2</sup> at the expense of 103,788 km<sup>2</sup> gained from Germany. See A. Sakson, "Ideologia wielokulturowości w konfrontacji z problematyką polityczną na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych," *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 1999, vol. 14–15, p. 131.

4 Ibidem, pp. 132–133. In the referenced book, one can find a detailed characterization of the indicated groups, which I omit in this text. Cf. S. Łach, *Osadnictwo wiejskie na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych Polski w latach 1945–1950*, Słupsk 1983; J. Kokot, A. Brożek, R. Rauziński, "Stosunki narodowościowe i społeczne na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych na tle stosunków przed II wojny światowej,"

Taking residence in the new territories – as well as later, during the period of the formation of new local communities – was accompanied by a widely prevailing atmosphere of temporariness and provisionality, as well as the transience of all legal settlements and official decisions, both in general (state-wide and international) and local dimensions.<sup>5</sup> The stereotypical image of the Western and Northern Territories did not look very favorable. In the common view, they were wild, dangerous lands where the rule of the survival of the fittest prevailed. The “fittest,” dictating conditions and setting his own justice, often turned out to be an officer of the Citizen’s Militia or Security Office. However, the civilizational advancement of the newly acquired territories, the range of potential opportunities for legal enrichment, or simply building one’s life anew (usually in materially better conditions than before) attracted not only ruffians, but also crowds of people who in the post-war reality, dreamed of land, work and, above all, their own place, home and family. A variety of fates and motivations drove them to settle there.

The large groups of settlers were dispersed across new areas, thus weakening the old social ties and contributing, at least in the initial period, to the social atomization of the family. Moreover, these ties had often been damaged earlier, for example, as a result of the repressive policy of the authorities of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics toward the Polish population in the territories taken over after 1945. In contrast to areas of stable settlements, such as Galicia and Wielkopolska, in the so-called Recovered Territories, “the family, rather than the local community, [...] emerged as the main bearer of cultural distinctions.”<sup>6</sup> I will return to this statement by Zbigniew Jasiewicz, very important to my perspective, later in the text.

Living in a place where diverse cultural attitudes and values came into contact and clashed, the new residents of the area naturally faced the need to establish common ground for behavior and to negotiate universal norms shared by the emerging community. This process was spontaneous and the groups had to develop a strategy for dealing with strangers. Thus, on the one hand, stereotypes weighed on the

[in:] *Problemy demograficzne Ziemi Zachodnich i Północnych PRL. Materiały z konferencji 14 i 15 X 1968*, Warszawa 1968.

5 Ibidem, p. 134. The border with the Soviet Union was not firmly established until August 1945; as late as 1946, the local population received “temporary” certificates of Polish nationality, and individual farmers provisional deeds granting ownership of German farms. Full equality in property rights with farmers from other areas of the country did not occur until 1957. Final recognition by the Federal Republic of Germany of the Western and Northern Territories as belonging to Poland came in 1970.

6 Z. Jasiewicz, “Wielokulturowość na tzw. Ziemiach Odzyskanych po II wojnie światowej. Rzeczywistość i reakcja nauki,” *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 1999, vol. 14–15, p. 128. See more extensively: L. Kosiński, *Procesy ludnościowe na Ziemiach Odzyskanych w latach 1945–1960*, Warszawa 1963.

shaping of mutual attitudes and opinions, and on the other hand, contacts intensified within the fledgling community with strong patronage (especially ideological) of the state.<sup>7</sup> Outside the cities, the development of new community ties was fostered by farm work and reciprocity obligations.<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon was even more intensive within the State Agricultural Farms (PGR) created in the 1950s.<sup>9</sup>

The attitude of the communist authorities to the lands incorporated into Poland after 1945 can be considered ambivalent. On the one hand, the official propaganda emphasized the “eternal” Slavdom, if not Polishness, of these territories, and presented their unification within Poland’s borders in terms of historical justice. On the other hand, however, in practice, most of the official activities boiled down to obliterating traces of the presence of German culture. During the Polish People’s Republic (PRL), a lack of industrial and infrastructural investment prevailed in the areas in question. Instead, post-German infrastructure was exploited, often in a devastating manner. Such state policies were consistent with the previously indicated atmosphere of uncertainty and temporariness, which undoubtedly hindered the formation of ties between people and the space they occupied. The exodus of people, especially the youth born after 1945, from the rural areas of the Northern and Western Territories began in the 1970s. However, it is difficult to assess unequivocally whether at that time it was the result of the collapse of the process of “integration with the motherland,” or whether, as in other areas of the country, it was the consequence of the migration of the rural population toward the cities associated with seeking social advancement, work or education.

The real test of stability and cohesion for the areas in question and the communities functioning there was the political, economic and cultural changes of 1989. They had a particularly drastic impact on the PGRs, leading to the collapse of most

7 This ideological patronage lasted practically until 1989, although it was especially intense until the late 1970s. In my opinion, the change in rhetoric toward the Western and Northern Territories (or, in fact, the lack of it in the initial period of transition) played a role in the social crisis that occurred in these areas in the first half of the 1990s.

8 Many examples are provided by: M. Kielar, “Poza ideologicznymi podziałami. Wybrane aspekty ‘stawania się ojczyzny’ w mazurskich wsiach,” *Borussia* 2000, no. 20/21, pp. 90–112; Z. Jasiewicz, op. cit. footnotes 1 and 2, pp. 126, 129.

9 Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne – large, socialist state-owned farms organized since 1949. See more extensively: K. Gawłowski, *Miejsce i rola PGR w polskim rolnictwie*, Warszawa 1985; E. Szpak, *Między osiedlem a zagrodą. Życie codzienne mieszkańców PGR-ów*, Warszawa 2005; D. Jarosz, *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948–1956 a chłopci*, Warszawa 1998. A bibliography on the establishment and operation of the PGR was presented by M. Machałek, “Likwidacja Państwowych Gospodarstw Rolnych i pierwszy etap przekształceń własnościowych państwowego sektora rolnego. Przyczynek do badań,” *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* 2022, vol. LXXXIV, p. 266.

of them and the rapid impoverishment of the communities linked to them. In 1990, these farms in the Western and Northern Territories cultivated about 40% of the total farmland. Just six years later, the share of land used by the Agricultural Property Agency of the State Treasury (AWRSP), which took over the assets of the liquidated state farms and privatized them, was only about 10%. The significance of this change becomes more pronounced when one takes into account the fact that in these areas, the PGRs often farmed very large swaths of land, usually several thousand hectares each, thus practically constituting the only employment opportunity for the surrounding population.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the employees of bankrupt agricultural enterprises, belonging to the lowest educated segment of society, had no chance of finding jobs in other sectors of the economy, as those too, saving themselves from economic bankruptcy, were rapidly reducing their staff. For the people who worked in the PGRs, their liquidation was coupled with the loss of valuable social benefits, such as free housing, company kindergartens and care by district nurses. Admittedly, by selling former company housing on extremely favorable terms, the AWRSP saved the former employees of these farms from homelessness, however, in the absence of any prospects for work, this meant that this group was kept in their previous place of residence – in municipalities and towns with very high unemployment rates.<sup>11</sup> Deprived of their only source of income, the communities clustered around the collapsed PGR not only impoverished rapidly, but the nature of the bond that held the group together and the relationships between its members changed.<sup>12</sup> A small part of state farms, having significantly improved their efficiency, managed to avoid bankruptcy. However, this was at the expense of reducing the workforce and lowering their salaries. As a result, the process of impoverishment of the population was slower, but it did not stop.

In the rural areas of the Western and Northern Territories, it was not only agricultural work that could provide the main source of livelihood. In the case of the so-called forest municipalities, many people (often entire settlements) found work in the State Forests. Although the forest districts providing these jobs had already

<sup>10</sup> G. Zabłocki, M. Sobczak, E. Piszczek, M. Kwiecińska, *Ubóstwo na terenach wiejskich północnej Polski*, Toruń 1999, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>12</sup> Assuming that, apart from the place of residence, the primary bonding factor of the group was joint work in the agricultural enterprise providing the primary source of income, it constituted an important contribution to the social life of the community, determining, among other things, the social status of its members, resulting from their function in the workplace. The liquidation of the PGR transformed the old structure, gradually replacing it with a new one that was more intangible, since most of the activities undertaken by the group's members were ad hoc, discontinuous and casual.

been reducing employment since the 1980s, a fundamental crisis occurred in the first half of the next decade. It resulted from a decline in demand for timber on the domestic market – mainly from the mining and furniture industries – as well as the periodically poor condition of many forest districts. While the reorganizations carried out in the forest districts made it possible to resolve the financial crisis of these institutions, this was done primarily at the expense of group layoffs of blue-collar workers, characterized, as in the PGRs, by very low professional qualifications. To reduce operating costs, private Forest Service Establishments (ZUL) were hired for most forestry work. These establishments, usually sole proprietorships, recruited part-time staff from among the local population to perform the work assigned to them. The former full-time employees of the State Forests, deprived of any other source of income, turned into a group of temporarily employed laborers, who often worked off the books for minimum wages and received no social benefits.<sup>13</sup> At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the forest districts began to sell off parts of their property that had been generating losses. In this way, the people of the forest settlements gradually became owners of the buildings they had previously occupied. This estate, which had been exploited for fifty years, sometimes required general renovation, which the new owners could not afford.

The aftermath of the transformation also affected smallholder peasants. Residents of villages near local industrial centers who owned two- to three-hectare farms were laid off first as it was argued that land-owning peasants would be better equipped to support their families than others. In parallel with the process of eliminating jobs in the local industry, the number of State Automobile Transport (PKS) services and regional lines of the Polish State Railways (PKP) was reduced. These processes were interlocked: the decline in the number of passengers triggered a reduction in the number of train and bus routes, thus taking away the possibility of commuting for those who were still employed.<sup>14</sup>

So much by way of introduction. It is time to focus on the analyzed localities and their inhabitants. The choice of villages is not accidental. Although they directly border each other, they are very different from one another in terms of the occupations that their residents performed (and partly still perform). For the purposes of this study, I present a brief historical outline of the following villages since the outbreak of World War II – the times immediately preceding the population exchange in this territory after 1945.<sup>15</sup>

.....  
13 G. Zabłocki, M. Sobczak, E. Piszczek, M. Kwiecińska, op. cit. pp. 50–51.

14 Ibidem, p. 51.

15 For detailed information on the history of Bartężek, see: G. Leydin, “Z dziejów,” [in:] *Morąg. Z dziejów miasta i powiatu*, collective ed., Olsztyn 1973, pp. 58–59, 79–80.



## Bartężek

In 1939, the village had 58 households and 275 residents. Two hundred and forty-three people earned their living from work in agriculture and forestry, 8 – from work in industry and crafts, and 2 – from work in trade and communications. At that time, in the municipality of Bartężek, understood as a village with a grange and hamlets, there were a total of seven agricultural and forestry farms: three between 0.5–5 hectares, one between 5–10 hectares, two between 10–20 hectares, and one over 100 hectares.

After World War II and the withdrawal of Soviet troops, from 1947, the village was gradually populated by settlers from the Kurpie region, Central Poland and Kielce. Land and livestock were not parceled out, but a PGR was established, where all newcomers found employment. The families hired there lived in the detached buildings that had previously housed the grange workers.<sup>16</sup> The basis of agricultural production, as before the war, was the production of grain (mainly rye) and rape-seed. In addition, a dairy and meat cow farm as well as a distillery operated on the farm. In summer, the animals grazed on the meadows, while in winter, fodder consisted of hay and pomace obtained in the production of crude spirits.

In 1972, the PGR built two single-story apartment blocks in Bartężek, thus solving the settlement's housing problems.<sup>17</sup> Probably for financial reasons, their standard was quite low, as a result of which to this day, the buildings have no central heating.<sup>18</sup> Today, they are heated with traditional stoves fueled by wood, bought or stolen from the forest. The PGR's staff, which formed the local community, maintained a compact structure for over forty years. Families or individuals arriving in the village usually remained there permanently. Frequent migrations in search of

---

For Tarda and Winiec: Z. Lietz, "Z dziejów wsi," [in:] *Ostróda. Z dziejów miasta i okolic*, ed. A. Wakar, Olsztyn 1975, pp. 94–95, 200.

- <sup>16</sup> Originally, in 1946, the State Land Estates were created, existing until 1949, at which time State Agricultural Farms were established in their place. During this period, the central authorities favored an individual, peasant economy. At that time, the tasks of state farms were reduced to providing services to individual producers – supplying qualified seeds and breeding livestock. E. Niedzielski, B. Wilamowski, "Rolnictwo," [in:] *Ostróda. Z dziejów miasta i okolic*, ed. E. Kulig, Olsztyn 1976, p. 263.
- <sup>17</sup> These problems were not due to the rapid expansion of the settlement's population. Some of the buildings that had not been renovated since the war years were simply inhabitable.
- <sup>18</sup> Until the plant's liquidation in 1993, residents were not affected by the situation. This was due to the fact that until then, the tenants did not pay their energy bills in full, but only small lump sums, while the rest of the costs was covered by the State Farm. This allowed apartments to be heated with electric appliances.

a better place of employment, so characteristic of PGRs, never applied to Bartężek.<sup>19</sup> Although the state farm offered jobs to all villagers, a few worked outside the locality either at a resort in nearby Tarda or in industrial plants in Ostróda or Morağ.

Older residents of Bartężek have particularly good memories of the 1970s and early 1980s – a time of greatest prosperity for all PGRs, significantly translating into workers' earnings. In addition to relatively high wages, employees received a number of social benefits in the form of highly paid, long-term parental leaves, reimbursed vacation holidays, free kindergartens, and care from a local nurse and doctor in Słonecznik,<sup>20</sup> which is two kilometers away. Furthermore, each family farmed a thirty-acre plot for its own needs, and could also raise cows and pigs. Their breeding sometimes assumed considerable proportions. One family living in a detached building "produced" about 40 pigs at a time. In that period, the prosperous life of the settlement's residents can be attested to by the statement of one of the villagers: "You bought some fodder, you stole some, and when you later sold all this, you could buy yourself the 'syrena.'"<sup>21</sup>

The situation began to deteriorate in the mid-1980s, when the PGRs started to suffer from shortages of production means – primarily fuel and fertilizers. The real breakthrough, however, did not come until the early 1990s, at which time unprofitable agricultural enterprises had their subsidies cut, and those operating under free market conditions were forced to seek savings, drastically reducing production costs. On November 19, 1991, by the decision of the Sejm, the liquidation of PGRs began, which lasted until December 31, 1993.<sup>22</sup> In Bartężek, the PGR operated for a long time, until 1993. The new owner of the land and property after the liquidated plant – the AWRSP – managed it until 1999, when the land and livestock were taken over by a 13-person employee co-op, headed by the last manager of the PGR. The company's shareholders were recruited from among the villagers, but had virtually no influence over its economic or personnel policies. All strategic decisions, as a result of the cooperative's status, were made by the one-person board, the manager.

In 2004, thirteen, sometimes 14, villagers worked at the former PGR, accounting for about 70% of the new workforce. Compared to the pre-1989 period, the number of employees was reduced twofold. At the same time, there was a threefold increase in production while using the same acreage. Most of those who were laid off either

19 Examples of this type of migration are provided by E. Tarkowska, "Bieda popegeerowska," [in:] *Zrozumieć biednego. O dawnej i obecnej biedzie w Polsce*, ed. E. Tarkowska, Warszawa 2000, p. 97.

20 Recently, this doctor has bought a house in Słonecznik, but has suspended his practice.

21 The author's archive. The Syrena was a Polish automobile model.

22 See more extensively: M. Machałek, op. cit. pp. 270–294; further literature there.

retired immediately or received 700-złoty pre-retirement (bridging) assistance. The relatively high wages these people earned in the 1970s translated into the amount of appanages they currently receive. These steady and reliable sources of income sometimes allowed the functioning of entire two-generation families, whose other members remained unemployed for various reasons.

There are two distinct areas in the village. Entering the settlement from Tarda (from the south) along an asphalt road leading among meadows, one comes across a perpendicular intersection with a dirt road, which in both directions leads to pre-war detached residential buildings. Since the late 1990s, as a result of the privatization of part of the PGRs' property, along with small plots of land, they have been owned by the residents. Some of the buildings scattered there, abandoned years earlier by tenants, have fallen into disrepair. Directly in the area of the intersection is a private building built after the war. About 40 meters from the main road to the left, on the opposite side to the detached buildings, there is a defunct store once belonging to the Municipal Cooperative "Peasant Self-Help."<sup>23</sup> This store, already private, was still in operation in 2001. Today, the residents of Bartężek are forced to get their basic groceries in the town of Słonecznik. From 2001–2004, two to three times a week, mobile stores passed through the village, allowing the residents to get their staples. Currently, this phenomenon is disappearing.

Passing the intersection, after about 50 meters, one reaches blocks of flats built parallel to the road, on its left side. The entrances to the staircases are on the opposite side. In summer, the road-facing windows are decorated with flowers (mostly geraniums) and satellite dishes pointed at the sky. Behind the blocks (on the side not visible from the asphalt road) is a small square with trodden ground – a frequent meeting place for residents. Behind it stretch the gardens where they grew vegetables for their own needs in 2004. Some built small wooden outbuildings on part of the land they own, where they store tools and wood used to heat their homes. Sometimes these also provide shelter for the ducks or chickens they raise. To the right of the gardens is a large square. It serves multiple functions. On sunny days, children used to play in it; nowadays women dry their laundry on ropes stretched from wooden poles. Large logs of timber brought from the forest are also deposited in this square, before they are chopped and stored in woodsheds and cellars. Sometimes residents also park their cars there.

23 Gminna Spółdzielnia "Samopomoc Chłopska – this is the name of the post-1944 production, trade and service cooperatives that existed in most rural and urban-rural municipalities in Poland. Established during the PRL period, the municipal cooperatives then had a virtual monopoly of trade in the countryside. See: Z. Chyra-Rolicz, "Rola spółdzielczości 'Samopomoc Chłopska' w życiu wsi (1944–1989)," *Zeszyty Wiejskie* 2016, vol. 22, pp. 713–725.

The road behind the blocks leads to the buildings of the former PGR, now the Bartęzek Agricultural Farm Ltd. In addition to the pre-war distillery and the now-renovated manor, which houses the plant's offices on the ground floor and the manager's private quarters on the first floor, there are typical outbuildings necessary for the operation of a large agricultural enterprise: warehouses, a modern stable, barns, and garages where equipment is stored, etc.

Comparing the condition of the village's residential infrastructure from almost two decades earlier to that of today, there is basically no difference. Only from talking to residents does it become clear that the former pre-war buildings are gradually emptying and deteriorating due to a lack of owners. Most of the plant's production crew is still recruited from Bartęzek. The production profile has not changed either; it continues to be agricultural production, animal husbandry and distillery spirit production. Since some workers have reached retirement age, the Bartęzek Farm is facing staff shortages. This is new compared to 2001–2004, when several unemployed workers were waiting to fill the vacant positions. The lack of people willing to work is a result of the aging of the population of this locality. Most young people have taken any opportunity to leave the village. Curiously, according to official data, the population of Bartęzek has decreased only slightly (from 132 people in 2004 to 121 people in 2022).<sup>24</sup> However, the actual number of residents is probably lower. This is because some of those who decided to leave the village remain registered in their parents' or grandparents' place of residence. Outside, not counting the bustling workers, there are virtually no signs of social life: neighbors conversing, children playing, the youth, etc.

Despite its attractive geographic location – the village lies by Lake Bartęzek, through which a section of the Elbląg Canal runs – the locality has never had a tourist character. Plans from the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to transform part of the agricultural land into a tourist area ended with the construction of a small beach, which is used mainly by local residents. Several plots of land have also been designated for development, but so far, there is no sign of investment. Near the site is the only tourist facility – a year-round house for rent – with the telling name “W Szczerym Polu” (In the Middle of Nowhere). Its owners are not from Bartęzek and do not live there permanently. It should be noted that the economic or cultural potential available to the villagers is insufficient to undertake such initiatives. At the same time, the fault for this state of affairs does not lie directly with them.

The owners of more than 90% of the village's land are the Bartęzek Agricultural Farm or the State Forests National Forest Holding. These institutions, bound by various regulations, are not allowed to sell land to private individuals. They are

<sup>24</sup> Data from the Population Registration Department of the Morağ Municipal Office; as of March 31, 2004 and December 19, 2022, respectively.

usually not even interested in doing so. The only land that residents can manage without restrictions are small plots of land, privatized along with residential buildings once owned by the PGR. Putting aside the limited appeal of this offer – these lands are not directly adjacent to the lake, and these are the ones most sought after by vacationers – none of the residents have so far opted to do so, as this decision would mean losing their residence for the duration of the sublease. If we take into account that the residents are elderly, financially disadvantaged and poorly educated, whose entire professional career was connected with work at the state farm, the lack of tourist initiatives becomes understandable. The only local institution with the potential to launch a process that in the long run could lead to attracting tourists to the village is the agricultural plant operating here. However, its management understandably focuses its activities on agricultural production, which is the basis for the livelihood of the people working in the village.

## Tarda

Before World War II, the number of inhabitants of the village was stable and remained at just over 200 people: in 1925, it was 215 people, and in 1939 – 216. It is known that before the war, there was an inn and a kind of guesthouse where rich townsfolk spent their vacations. However, the main source of livelihood was work in the forest.

After 1945, the village's property was taken over by the state treasury, but no changes were made to its character.<sup>25</sup> The first post-war settlers began to appear in the village as early as 1946. From the very beginning, the authorities intended to continue forest management. Some of the new residents initially came here only for seasonal forestry work. Over time, they moved in pre-war buildings taken over by the State Forests and connected their lives with work in the forest. Interestingly, most of them had never worked in the forest before the war. These people mostly came from the smallholder farms of Kielce, Eastern Galicia, Podhale and Mazowsze. Later, some of them found employment outside forestry; men in local industrial plants, and women in a resort built in the early 1960s.<sup>26</sup> At the beginning of the 1980s,

---

<sup>25</sup> The Polish forest administration was organized from May to October 1945. The departure of the first foresters to work in Mazury was organized by the Directorate of State Forests as early as May 22. The Miłomłyn Forest District was reactivated in the fall of 1945. W Fafiński, "Leśnictwo," [in:] *Ostróda. Z dziejów miasta i okolic*, ed. E. Kulig, Olsztyn 1976, pp. 281–282.

<sup>26</sup> For example, one of my respondents (Benedykt), now retired, worked in several Miłomłyn plants: the Municipal Cooperative "Peasant Self-Help," the Cooperative of Agricultural Wheels, a sawmill, a timber yard, a railroad and a tile factory. Currently, none of them are in operation.

the State Forests built two blocks of flats in the village, to which some of the families who had previously shared old German buildings moved.

To commute to work and school, Tarda's residents used a convenient railroad line to Moraġ and Ostróda.<sup>27</sup> Until the late 1960s, there was also a four-class elementary school in the village. Later, the building became the property of the Olsztyn Board of Education, which organized camps there until the mid-1990s. Currently, the building is not in use for most of the year.

None of the permanent residents of Tarda worked at the PGR, although from the 1970s onward, the wages of agricultural workers far exceeded those paid by the State Forests. Occasionally, women were employed part-time during the busiest periods, harvesting or digging. As in Bartęzek, there was a Municipal Cooperative store in Tarda until the 1990s. The villagers provided themselves with most of their groceries. Although they did not run full-scale farms themselves, for their own needs they raised chickens, ducks, pigs, and cows, which grazed on meadows leased from the State Forests. Around most houses, there were small gardens where vegetables and fruits were grown. Some produce, mainly mushrooms, blueberries and wild strawberries, was also provided by the forest.

An important role in the life of the village was played by the resort, built from 1961–1963 on the border of the settlement, directly on Lake Bartęzek. It was a government resort used by the Central Council of Trade Unions based in Warsaw. From 1970, it became the property of the Lenin Gdańsk Shipyard, which organized there both “classic” two-week stays, winter holidays for children, as well as short weekend events. The Gdańsk plant also made the center available to Warsaw theaters. For this reason, in the 1970s and 1980s, Tarda was visited by a whole plethora of Polish actors, musicians and directors, colorfully imprinting themselves in the memory of the residents. Outside of breaking the monotony of village life introduced by incoming tourists, the resort primarily offered year-round employment. Those employed at the resort received free lunches, and it was also possible to buy meals for family members for a small fee. “Byproducts” of the facility’s operation were so-called “zlewki” – leftovers – and other food waste, which locals used in raising pigs.

Residents of Tarda usually cared about the highest possible level of education for their children. Hence, many people born there can boast secondary and even higher education. After graduating from school, they usually decided to leave their hometown. The relatively high level of education of the younger residents of the village may have been influenced by the forest character of the settlement and the resulting presence of foresters. This professional group, due to its education and usually

---

<sup>27</sup> The service was terminated as unprofitable in September 1995; at the same time, the newly renovated track was dismantled. The place of the former train was taken by the PKS Ostróda bus.

distinguished level of culture, was at all times a kind of local aristocracy. There were two forestries in Tarda. The people in charge of them grew into the local community and often became its leaders.

The transformation of the economic system and the deep economic crisis that preceded it significantly affected the life of the village. Almost all industrial plants were closed down. The reforming Miłomłyn Forest District, which includes the forests around Tarda, reduced operating costs and laid off most of its forestry workers. Some lumberjacks continued to work in the forest, in private companies (Forest Service Companies – ZUL<sup>28</sup>), which were contracted by the State Forests to perform certain tasks. The change of employer meant much worse working conditions. Initially, staff reductions had to do with profit maximization and falling demand for timber. Today, modern, efficient machines are successfully replacing sawyers.

The changes also extended to the resort. The Gdańsk Shipyard, which was experiencing a financial crisis, transferred the holiday resort to the care of a commission agent. The changes introduced by the new administrator meant that the facility did not go bankrupt, and managed to stay afloat. However, this was done at the expense of laying off some staff and tensions in relations between the resort's management and residents.<sup>29</sup> In 2004, only two men were working outside the forest in Tarda. Those who failed to keep their jobs in the State Forests or find work with private forestry companies received pensions, retirement benefits or were unemployed. Their financial situation was boosted by seasonal reforestation and silviculture work organized by the forest district. At the turn of the century, the village also had seasonal buy-back centers for snails and mushrooms.

In 2004, Tarda was inhabited by 135 people, today only 96.<sup>30</sup> During my first visit, the only post-war construction projects in the settlement were workers' blocks of flats, a barrack of the Municipal Cooperative store, the forester's lodge, and a recreation

---

<sup>28</sup> Zakłady usług leśnych – ZUL – are companies that, among other things, harvest timber (down trees), pick it (transport it from the place of cutting to the place of storage), plant trees, and perform various forest care work such as mowing weeds on crops. They engage in forest protection, e.g., building fences for crops so that animals do not eat young seedlings. They also build and repair small-scale forest infrastructure.

<sup>29</sup> The layoffs included all those employed at the resort who lived in Tarda. The new agent has consistently denied jobs to residents from this village. He has also introduced beach fees and banned local youths from attending discos held at the resort. The peculiar symbiosis that bonded the resort with the locals has not been restored to this day. The resort changed its manager several years ago. Currently, under the name “Camp Tarda,” a Piaseczno-based tourism company organizes camps for children and teenagers there, during which participants learn horseback riding and sailing. The tightly fenced and monitored area remains closed to locals.

<sup>30</sup> Population status is reported after: Department of Population Records of the City and Municipality of Miłomłyn as of December 31, 2003 and December 19, 2022, respectively.



center in a remote location.<sup>31</sup> This status has not changed, not counting the few recreational houses built at the exit of the road in the direction of Bartężek. There is no store in Tarda again; the one mentioned in the footnote went bankrupt a few years after opening. By the end of 2004, the forest district had privatized most of the residential buildings, along with the land and adjacent small gardens. Most of the houses needed repairs, but their technical condition was better than in neighboring Bartężek. Until privatization, it was the State Forestry that maintained the housing infrastructure of its employees.

Entering Tarda from the direction of Miłomłyn, we come across the first buildings on the left. Behind them, the asphalt road turns at a 90-degree angle to the right. Behind the bend, two blocks of flats emerge on the left. Opposite them, back in 2004, there used to be a canopy of the former store. Currently, a building was put near the site. To the right of the blocks, which run parallel to the road, there is a large grassy square. This space has similar functions to the square in Bartężek – once a play area, today it is used either for parking tractors and trailers that haul wood, or for processing firewood. This is the central point of the village. Directly behind the blocks stretch gardens, where some residents grow vegetables.<sup>32</sup> Wood and agricultural tools are stored in shacks and sheds. In 1947, behind the blocks, residents erected a cross.<sup>33</sup> In the 1980s, the old and decrepit symbol was replaced with a new one. Before my arrival, May services were held in front of it. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this custom was abandoned. Older women, however, still adorn the cross before Easter. The low metal fence surrounding it probably comes from a pre-war German cemetery.

In Tarda, usually one house is inhabited by two or three families. On the right is the post-war forester's lodge. Slightly farther to the left are meadows, cut by the line of a railroad embankment. This area has been leased by one of the villagers who uses it for horse breeding. At one time, his venture attracted enthusiasts of off-road horseback riding, who came to the village on vacations and days off. Today, the owner has abandoned this part of the activity, taking care of the horses for the Camp Tarda resort. The road, ascending, turns to the left. At the top on the right

31 In addition, in 2003, one shed was built, consisting of a "living" area and a stable for a horse. On the plot of land after the demolished pre-war house, the construction of a dacha began. In the spring of 2004, a new store directly next to the barracks of the former Municipal Cooperative was built.

32 Some of them were already lying fallow in 2004 due to the unprofitability of production, and this process is now worsening. It can also be explained by the aging of the rural population.

33 The wood for the cross was provided by the forester, but he did it unofficially so as not to expose himself to the authorities of the time.



are the stables and outbuildings,<sup>34</sup> and on the opposite side are the last residential houses. The road leading through the forest takes one to the resort.

In 2004, the resort was past its prime. In addition to the main building overlooking the beach, there were also summer houses on the site, deep in the forest.<sup>35</sup> Apart from the discos held on summer weekends, the place did not offer any special attractions. However, it was possible to rent a canoe and pedal boat. There was a time when the resort was numerously visited by tourists from Germany; for some, the prices were attractive, while others wanted to revisit the places known from their childhood or the stories of their ancestors. Even during the peak season, however, the resort had vacancies. Although the current manager has not made spectacular investments, he has conscientiously renovated and refurbished the resort, adapting it to its activities. Concerned for the safety of the children staying there, he ensured it was securely fenced off from the rest of the settlement and, consequently, its residents. The northern end of the summer resort, bordered by the asphalt road, is marked by the installations of a sewage treatment plant – this is the end of the village.<sup>36</sup>

## Winiec

Little is known about the pre-war history of Winiec. In 1937–1939, the population of the settlement was estimated at 205 people. It is difficult to establish the character of the village before the war on this basis. However, it should be assumed that Winiec was a purely agricultural village. I have not come across any references or material evidence indicating the presence of tourism in this settlement. Winiec had also not been a forest village; if it had, it would likely have preserved its character even after the war. The agricultural land developed by the settlers must have existed before the war.

The first post-war settlers began arriving in the village around 1947. Already in 1950, the locality had a one-classroom school.<sup>37</sup> The children continued their

---

34 Before the war, on the site of these stables and probably farther (into the woods) behind them, there were buildings of the guesthouse.

35 The summer houses were of varying standards. The oldest small wooden chalets, equipped with only one room and electrical installation, were gradually replaced with more modern ones. Several such structures, purchased by a few residents, stood in the village. Their owners used to rent them out to befriended tourists.

36 On the side of the road opposite to the resort is the former train station building, now inhabited by a retired PKP employee and his wife.

37 The first teacher committed suicide after two years. Her place was taken by a Pole, an autochthon, local and community activist Józef Jakub Baranowski, who settled there in 1952 and had been connected with Nowe Miasto Lubawskie before the war. I owe to him a lot for the valuable information about the life of the village.

education in Liksajny. Initially, the residents, convinced that the Germans would return quickly, did not invest in the farms they received. The change came slowly, with the arrival of the next generations already born there. Until the 1980s, Winiec remained an agricultural settlement. The peasants farmed on the land granted to them by the state, supplying themselves with groceries at the Municipal Cooperative store. Agricultural production was never profitable there. This was mainly determined by the poor quality of the soils – the highest classified land was class 4. In the opinion of my respondents, the residents themselves were partly to blame for this as they were not very conscientious about farm work. The situation was saved by assistance from the military and scouts, as well as farmers’ exemptions from paying taxes. The functioning of the farms was facilitated by planned contracting – mainly of rapeseed – and cheap access to mechanical farming equipment rented by the Cooperative of Agricultural Wheels. Supplementing the meager income from farming, some men, as in the case of Tarda, worked in nearby state enterprises or in the forest. The villagers’ standard of living began to rise (paradoxically to the country’s economic situation) in the mid-1980s.

During this period, the first owners decided to sell some of their land to private individuals for use as recreational facilities.<sup>38</sup> At that time, some residents also decided to transfer their land, along with posthumous ownership of the buildings, to the state in exchange for favorable pensions.<sup>39</sup> In 2004, the buildings were in a deplorable technical condition and were almost exclusively suitable for demolition. Today, some of them have been razed. The attractiveness of Winiec as a summer resort settlement was determined by its location. The village is located between two lakes – Bartężek (from the east) and Ruda Woda (from the west). Moreover, despite the fact that there is no quality road leading to the settlement, it can be conveniently reached by exiting a few kilometers north of Miłomłyn from the National Road No. 7 (DK No. 7) between Warsaw and Gdańsk and taking a dirt track to reach the settlement. Winiec was one of the few settlements that offered plots for sale. There was a group of buyers (they were mainly from Elbląg and Gdańsk) who initiated the construction of a type of summer “hamlet” on the northern outskirts of the settlement. Over time, more and more owners decided to split and sell the land they owned for tourists’ needs.

The funds obtained through land sales were not invested by the owners in their farms. Aside from ad hoc repairs, sometimes supporting children, most of the funds

<sup>38</sup> At first, landlords had considerable difficulty with this. The area around Winiec, as all agricultural land, could not be subdivided. Also, erecting a building required special permits.

<sup>39</sup> This observation applies to the elderly, whose children had already decided to leave the village permanently by then.

were consumed. Since then, agricultural production has almost completely ceased in Winiec.<sup>40</sup> The reasons for this situation are twofold: the village is now inhabited mainly by elderly people, no longer capable of hard physical labor; moreover, the profitability of agricultural production has declined sharply with the tightening of production technology. Residents have even stopped growing subsistence crops and raising livestock (except for chickens). At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, basic supplies were provided by two grocery stores.

In 2004, Winiec had only 72 permanent residents. In 2022, there were 105.<sup>41</sup> New owners of buildings and tourist infrastructure being developed in the village are responsible for this increase. The vast majority of owners of summer cottages or year-round houses stay here temporarily and remain unregistered, so they are invisible to the Miłomłyn Municipality Office, and their number remains difficult to determine. However, there is a small group of newcomers who have settled here permanently due to their tourist activities. They are the ones responsible for the gradual increase in population.

In 2004, the number of tourists staying in the settlement already exceeded the number of permanent residents during the holiday season. At that time, there were about thirty summer houses ready for rent. Today, there are several times more. The settlement is divided into separate parts: the old one, which consists mainly of former German buildings occupied by old residents, a “dacha-hood” built on previous farmland, and two remote “hamlets”: Winiec Family Houses and Zatoka Leśna (Forest Bay). The easiest way to reach the settlement is from the side of DK No. 7. However, residents usually choose the old forest duct connecting the settlement with Miłomłyn, located south of it.

Entering the settlement from this particular side, leaving the forest, we come across small meadows, which in the past were used for cattle grazing. In 2004, almost no one used them. Currently, a children’s playground has been set up in part of this area.<sup>42</sup> Further on, the forest duct meets on the right with a forest road, leading along the southern edge of Lake Bartężek to Tarda. One of the two tourist “hamlets,” Winiec Family Houses, can be reached this way. The second, Leśna Zatoka, is located on the road to Miłomłyn. The intersection marks the southern edge of the village. A cross was erected at the site, which, like in Tarda, is decorated for the Easter

---

<sup>40</sup> In 2004, there were three farms in the village. Today, there is only one, whose owner also provides agrotechnical services for summer visitors.

<sup>41</sup> The number of residents of Winiec is reported according to information from the Population Registration Department of the City and Municipality of Miłomłyn as of March 31, 2004 and February 19, 2022, respectively.

<sup>42</sup> It is used most by the children of summer residents, as these are the most numerous in the village.

holidays. In 2004, a few meters past the intersection, on the left, there was a grocery store, now defunct.<sup>43</sup> The road continues straight ahead, passing residential houses and, mostly unused, farm buildings on both sides. The only functioning store in the village is about 100 meters away, in the middle of the old “farm” part of the village.<sup>44</sup> The road goes straight between old farms, at the back of which summer houses have now sprung up in several places.<sup>45</sup> Behind them is the “dacha-hood.” In 2004, the plan of Winiec simplistically resembled a large letter “T.” Today, due to the intensification of development, both from the vertical and horizontal lines of the “T” shoot out perpendicular streets, where new properties are being built.

The resort part of the village attracts attention with its very compact, if formally heavily mixed, architecture. A variety of wooden and brick structures are separated from each other by lawns only a few dozen meters wide. Despite this, their owners almost always choose to build fences. These fences, overgrown with climbing plants, in addition to their “decorative” function, isolate the owners from their neighbors. To some extent, the form of the building reveals its age. The older ones, erected back in the 1980s and early 1990s, look rather raw and simple, and the materials used in their construction are reminiscent of a previous era. The forms of construction of the last few years are much more individualized, and the ingenuity of the owners sometimes verges on kitsch. Thus, in a limited space, buildings stylized as small medieval castles, saloons straight out of the Wild West, “Finnish cottages,” peasant homesteads, noblemen’s mansions, etc., stand next to each other. Naturally, the appearance of the dachas also reflects the wealth of their owners.

In the case of older buildings from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is rather obvious that some of the materials used in construction were collected randomly or had been repurposed. The buildings themselves were erected using half-amateur, frugal methods. Modern ones – designed and built by specialized companies – are insulated and equipped with central heating systems, allowing year-round use.

The “dacha-hood” does not have a clear center. The area around the road junction could be considered as such, however, this place does not organize the space in any way nor is it vital for summer residents’ leisure time. The land closest to the village was parceled out the fastest. The density of development is the highest

43 The investment was unique; it was made by a villager who in 1985 was the first to decide to sell part of the land for summer houses.

44 Its owner comes from near Elbląg and does not live in Winiec permanently. As late as 2003, the store was still located on the site of the former Municipal Cooperative store – in a part of the pre-war building leased from the settlement’s mayor. At present, a small, modern building has been erected for the store, adjacent to the site.

45 This is a noticeable change from 2004, when there was one summer house in the old part of the village.

there. The new buildings remain at a considerable distance from the main traffic routes. The saturation of space with summer infrastructure is smaller there. However, this situation comes with a certain inconvenience – theft. This phenomenon has not been dealt with for decades. Today, to an even greater extent than twenty years earlier, Winiec is a village with two faces. In the summer and on weekends, it bustles with tourists, and the air is permeated by the smells of smoked fish and grilled meats. In the off-season, most of the buildings shut down, and the native population sits in front of their TVs.

### Summary and conclusions

If I could economically summarize the transformations that have taken place in the villages in question and the lives of their residents over the past two decades, I would risk using the term “stagnation.” Conducting observations in 2001–2004, I had the impression that I arrived in the area at the moment of the formation (or establishment) of a new socio-cultural order following a metaphorical tornado triggered by the country’s political transformation in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This time, therefore, should be the starting point for a new economic, social and cultural order. Meanwhile, in the vast majority of cases, almost nothing has changed. “There is no store in Tarda again” – the opening sentence of this study may be a symbolic summary of the last two decades, at least as far as the surveyed villages and, most likely, others in the region are concerned.

A simple answer to the question of what caused it does not exist. Although the economic and socio-cultural crisis in these areas developed on a full scale as a result of the aftermath of the reforms initiated by the Round Table deliberations, it had already been consuming these areas earlier, masked by the financial and ideological patronage of the PRL. In my view, the greatest weakness of the surveyed communities has been their insufficient bonding with the local space and history of the area after 1945.<sup>46</sup>

This phenomenon can be illustrated with two ways of using the concept of “homeland” proposed by Stanisław Ossowski.<sup>47</sup> The ideological homeland is attributed to the nation as a whole and is the same for all; it is generated by the beliefs of individuals to participate in a certain collectivity associated in the historical process with a particular area. The private homeland, different for different members of the nation,

---

<sup>46</sup> I believe this statement can be extended to other areas of the so-called Recovered Territories, which are facing similar problems today.

<sup>47</sup> With regard to the area of Mazury, this was done by Wojciech Łukowski. See: W. Łukowski, *Spoleczne tworzenie ojczyzn. Studium tożsamości mieszkańców Mazur*, Warszawa 2002, pp. 46–69.

is built on the personal experiences of individuals, which is determined by a direct relationship to a limited space where one usually spends most of one's life. The complete overlap of the above dimensions leads to a situation in which individuals do not define the local environment as a specific space with special values, or in the opposite situation, marginalized persons "participate" only in the private homeland.

The territories of Mazury and the process of their settlement after 1945 were subjected to special state guardianship, which was in force with varying intensity in the PRL.<sup>48</sup> This was manifested in the following dimensions: political-ideological – restoration to the motherland of territories lost in the "unjust" historical process, and compensation for the losses suffered by the country in World War II; and socio-economic – the possibility of rapid economic and civilizational advancement, the creation of additional multi-hectare state agricultural conglomerates. Thus, being a "Mazurian" involved a special kind of responsibility to the country, but also the resulting privileges. The ideology appealed to the patriotism of the new guardians of the area, but only in the national sense. This doctrine, it must be admitted, was successful to the extent that for the generations settled in Mazury and born there today, these territories are Poland, not East Prussia.

It has been much more difficult with regard to the functioning of the homeland in the private sense. I believe that for the people who came to Mazury after 1945 and their children, this region has never fully emerged as a private homeland in Osowski's sense, that is, a place where a personal, intimate relationship to space and landscape is developed, and around which private histories and mythologies accrue.

The political transformation of 1989 thus found these communities without a sufficiently established and stable relationship with an effectively culturally appropriated space. In the process, the now ideologically outdated narrative about the so-called Recovered Territories and their recolonizers was abandoned. In practice, one might say, the former settlers and their descendants were left to fend for themselves, without concrete solutions for the region's economy and its new cultural image. In a situation of economic and social crisis, groups activate rescue mechanisms that involve a return to tried and tested, traditional forms of integration and action. However, they do not always prove to be effective! In the case of small rural communities in Poland, this has often meant leaning on the family. The importance of the family as the main carrier of cultural content in the case of the formation of communities in the Northern and Western Lands was also emphasized by the aforementioned Zbigniew Jasiewicz.

---

48 According to Łukowski's research, the mass migration movement came to an end in 1958. However, this does not mean that the process ended definitively at that time. Through its attractiveness, the areas continued to appeal to new people. In an altered character, this process continues to this day.

Unfortunately, after 1989 in Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec, “leaning on the family” could not take place. The lack of a permanent identification bond that connects individuals to the area they live in, which is a key factor in the formation of local and regional consciousness, with the marked deterioration of the economic situation experienced by the communities in the following decade, caused a rapid exodus of the local population, in search of sources of income.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the family as the basic economic and social unit in times of crisis could not effectively shoulder the hardships of the transition, as it ceased to exist in an extended and intergenerational dimension. What remained was the state, whose actions were ad hoc in nature and amounted to little material assistance, allowing only to sustain the existence of groups.

The presented communities can hardly be considered guilty of the situation. Essentially from one year to the next, they have come to function under the conditions of capitalist society, and practically from the beginning, in its late-modern phase. According to Zygmunt Bauman, what sets it apart is the fact that societies “have no interest” in engaging their members in the role of producers, thus cutting off more and more groups from sources of income. The residents of Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec are prime examples of this. The current “tasks” of individuals boil down to consuming as many goods as possible.

To meet the standard, to become a fully-fledged and valuable member of society, one must respond efficiently and effectively to the excitement and temptations of the consumer market. One must contribute not so much to the collective productive potential as to the capacity of the market – to the demand tailored to the supply.<sup>50</sup>

In the context proposed by Bauman, being poor (usually) does not mean constantly teetering on the border below which biological degradation begins. It means, first of all, being a person who is cast outside the framework of society and who does not get to play any role in it, even a negative one. From this perspective, the poor should not exist at all so that they do not lower the macroeconomic statistics, hence the branded individuals retreat into social oblivion.

---

49 Andrzej Sakson points out that the contemporary Mazurian migration is one of the factors that destabilizes the social balance of the region, thus hindering the revival or transformation of regional communities. See: A. Sakson, *Stosunki narodowościowe na Warmii i Mazurach 1945–1997*, Poznań 1998.

50 „By sprostać normie, by stać się w pełni opierzonym i wartościowym członkiem społeczeństwa, trzeba sprawnie i skutecznie reagować na podniety i pokusy konsumpcyjnego rynku. Trzeba wносить swój wkład nie tyle do zbiorowego potencjału wytwórczego, ile do pojemności rynku – do popytu skrojonego na miarę podaży”. See: Z. Bauman, “Zbędni, niechciani, odrzuceni – czyli o biednych w zamożnym świecie,” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1998, vol. XVII, no. 2, p. 6.

Disillusioned, structurally maladjusted, and excluded for economic reasons outside the mainstream of national, and even regional, life, the residents of Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec live out their days, watching the great world through the windows of their color TVs, which paradoxically, in the years of the PRL splendor, could only be a dream.

This social marginalization does not apply to all residents. In each of the communities, some individuals have found themselves better in the new realities, working, running businesses and engaging in new forms of social life. However, I doubt that it will be possible to animate the social life of Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec effectively through their activity alone.

Life abhors a vacuum; new settlers will soon appear with new dreams, ideas about life and concepts of the role and history of the area. In some places, they are already coming, but that is another story.

## **Bibliography**

### **Unpublished sources**

Interviews with residents of Bartężek, Tarda and Winiec – in possession of the author.

Population Registration Department of the City and Municipality of Miłomłyn.

Population Registration Department of the Morąg Municipal Office.

Poznań University Library, sygn. 1518569 III, K. Walczak, *Segmentaryzacja ubóstwa. Antropologiczne studium społeczności lokalnych w okresie regresu*, Poznań 2005, PhD thesis written under the supervision of Prof. Wojciech Burszta, mpis.

### **Literature**

Bauman Z., “Zbędni, niechciani, odrzuceni – czyli o biednych w zamożnym świecie,” *Kultura i Społeczeństwo* 1998, vol. XVII, no. 2.

Chyra-Rolicz Z., “Rola spółdzielczości ‘Samopomoc Chłopska’ w życiu wsi (1944–1989),” *Zeszyty Wiejskie* 2016, vol. 22.

Fafiński W., “Leśnictwo,” [in:] *Ostróda. Z dziejów miasta i okolic*, ed. E. Kulig, Olsztyn 1976.

Gawłowski K., *Miejsce i rola PGR w polskim rolnictwie*, Warszawa 1985.

Jarosz D., *Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w latach 1948–1956 a chłopci*, Warszawa 1998.

Jasiewicz Z., “Wielokulturowość na tzw. Ziemiach Odzyskanych po II wojnie światowej. Rzeczywistość i reakcja nauki,” *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 1999, vol. 14–15.



- Kielar M., "Poza ideologicznymi podziałami. Wybrane aspekty 'stawania się ojczyzny' w mazurskich wsiach," *Borussia* 2000, no. 20/21.
- Kokot J., Brożek A., Rauziński R., "Stosunki narodowościowe i społeczne na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych na tle stosunków sprzed II wojny światowej" [in:] *Problemy demograficzne Ziemi Zachodnich i Północnych PRL. Materiały z konferencji 14 i 15 X 1968*, Warszawa 1968.
- Kosiński L., *Procesy ludnościowe na Ziemiach Odzyskanych w latach 1945–1960*, Warszawa 1963.
- Leydin G., "Z dziejów," [in:] *Morąg. Z dziejów miasta i powiatu*, collective ed., Olsztyn 1973.
- Lietz Z., "Z dziejów wsi," [in:] *Ostróda. Z dziejów miasta i okolic*, ed. A. Wakar, Olsztyn 1975.
- Łach S., *Osadnictwo wiejskie na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych Polski w latach 1945–1950*, Słupsk 1983.
- Łukowski W., *Społeczne tworzenie ojczyzn. Studium tożsamości mieszkańców Mazur*, Warszawa 2002.
- Machałek M., "Likwidacja Państwowych Gospodarstw Rolnych i pierwszy etap przekształceń własnościowych państwowego sektora rolnego. Przyczynek do badań," *Roczniki Dziejów Społecznych i Gospodarczych* 2022, vol. LXXXIV.
- Niedzielski E., Wilamowski B., "Rolnictwo," [in:] *Ostróda. Z dziejów miasta i okolic*, ed. E. Kulig, Olsztyn 1976.
- Sakson A., "Ideologia wielokulturowości w konfrontacji z problematyką polityczną na Ziemiach Zachodnich i Północnych," *Sprawy Narodowościowe* 1999, vol. 14–15.
- Sakson A., *Stosunki narodowościowe na Warmii i Mazurach 1945–1997*, Poznań 1998.
- Szpak E., *Między osiedlem a zagrodą. Życie codzienne mieszkańców PGR-ów*, Warszawa 2005.
- Tarkowska E., "Bieda popegeerowska," [in:] *Zrozumieć biednego. O dawnej i obecnej biedzie w Polsce*, ed. E. Tarkowska, Warszawa 2000.
- Zabłocki G., Sobczak M., Piszczek E., Kwiecińska M., *Ubóstwo na terenach wiejskich północnej Polski*, Toruń 1999.