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Problems of Formation of Regional Identity Among Rural Residents of Western Pomerania. A Sociological Analysis

PROBLEMY KSZTAŁTOWANIA SIĘ TOŻSAMOŚCI REGIONALNEJ MIESZKAŃCÓW OBSZARÓW WIEJSKICH POMORZA ZACHODNIEGO. ANALIZA SOCJOLOGICZNA

Streszczenie

Artykuł jest próbą naszkicowania zasadniczych problemów socjologicznych kształtowania się tożsamości regionalnej na obszarach wiejskich Pomorza Zachodniego po 1945 roku. Na Pomorzu Zachodnim wchodzącym w skład tzw. Ziem Zachodnich i Północnych Polski nastąpił jeden z największych eksperymentów społecznych XX wieku. W miejsce niemieckich mieszkańców tych terenów uciekających przed Armią Radziecką oraz w okresie powojennym wysiedlonych, osiedlono Polaków z różnych regionów kraju, w tym około 40% mieszkańców wschodnich terenów dawnej Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej włączonych do ZSRR. Mieszkańcy tych obszarów stanowili mozaikę różnorodnych tożsamości lokalnych i regionalnych. Społeczności lokalne i regionalne podlegały procesom adaptacji i integracji społecznej. W rezultacie tych procesów wykształciła się nowa tożsamość odwołująca się do obecnego miejsca zamieszkania.
Artykuł składa się z trzech części oraz wprowadzenia i zakończenia. W części pierwszej przedstawiono rozważania na temat pojęcia tożsamości regionalnej. Odniesiono się do różnych koncepcji formułowanych w socjologii polskiej i światowej. W części drugiej skoncentrowano się na powojennej historii Pomorza Zachodniego, akcentując procesy osadnicze wpływające na indywidualną i grupową identyfikację z obszarem województwa zachodniopomorskiego. W końcowej, trzeciej części, podjęto próbę wieloaspektowego opisu tożsamości lokalnej i regionalnej najbardziej tradycyjnej kategorii mieszkańców wsi – rolników. Tym samym analiza nie obejmuje pozostałych kategorii mieszkańców obszarów wiejskich: byłych pracowników PGR-ów, nauczycieli, urzędników administracji publicznej, pracowników pomocy społecznej

i opieki zdrowotnej, wreszcie osób pracujących w miastach, a na wsi jedynie mieszkających. Niech te kwestie dla autora pozostaną wyzwaniem na kolejny artykuł.

Słowa kluczowe: socjologia wsi, tożsamość regionalna, zbiorowości terytorialne, Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne Polski

Introduction

Sense of identity, integral to which is identification with and attachment to a region, is an important element in the construction of social communities and the quality of social capital that resides within them. Interest in this issue arises for various reasons. First, the West Pomeranian province has been operating for over twenty years, which by law inaugurates it as a territorial community of inhabitants. Unlike most Polish regions, Western Pomerania cannot draw on centuries-old historical traditions in the same way that, for example, Greater Poland or the Mazovian regions can do. Even among farmers, the history of "acquisition" and personal identification with Western Pomerania dates back only three or four generations at most.

This article is an attempt to trace, in sociological terms, the shaping of regional identity in rural parts of Western Pomerania after 1945. It consists of an introduction, three parts, and a conclusion. The first part examines the concept of regional identity, with particular reference to various formulations of it in Polish and world sociology. The second part focuses on the settlement processes affecting individual and group identification within the area of the West Pomeranian province during the post-war period. In the third part, an attempt is made to describe the local and regional identity of the most traditional category of rural inhabitants, namely farmers. The analysis excludes other categories of rural residents, such as former employees of state-owned farms, teachers, public administration officials, social welfare and health-care workers, and people who work in cities but live in the countryside. These other categories will be addressed in an ensuing publication.

1. The concept of regional identity

Identity is a basic concept in many disciplines, ranging from theology and philosophy to political science, psychology, and sociology. In sociology, it is a rather ambiguous concept which is present in various dichotomies and continuums from individual identity to collective identity, symbolic identity to real interpersonal relations, and a relatively homogenous traditional society to one with a complex multicultural identity.

The sociological study of identity developed mainly in the interwar period, thanks to Herbert Mead and the school he started.[1] The recent revival of interest in identity is related to the work of Miguel Castells, who pointed to the significant role played by grassroots organisations in creating cultural, religious, national, and regional identities. Referring to territorial identity, Castells states that

> People socialise and interact in their local environment – whether it is rural, urban or suburban one – and build social networks among their neighbours. At the same time, locally established identities intersect with other sources of social meaning and recognition in a highly differentiated pattern that allows alternative interactions.[2]

For his part, the American historian, Larry Wolff, points to the importance of top-down identity, referring to the "idea of Galicia" created by the Austrian invaders after the first partition of Poland.[3] As he argues, the Galician identity gained its clear shape at the beginning of the 19th century when Chancellor Metternich came up with the idea of transforming Poles, Ruthenians, Jews and Austrian officials into real Galicians. Interestingly, the idea of building a multicultural Galician identity survived the fall of Austria-Hungary by mythologising land that does not exist today and the national relations that supposedly existed there.[4]

Analogies suggest themselves. For example, the regional identity of the inhabitants of Western Pomerania was also subject to various external influences. This region was the subject of a kind of socio-political experiment in the period of the People's Republic of Poland, but it also developed as a result of bottom-up activities created by local activists, local governments, and local non-governmental organisations.

In the analysis of regional identity in Polish sociology, an important turning point was the year 1945, when World War II ended, and population migration took place on an unprecedented scale. At that time, not only did the Polish population clash with the indigenous population, but there were also clashes between migrants from various regions of Poland and abroad. The processes taking place were very dynamic. This was pointed out by Stanisław Ossowski, who studied the processes

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1   A very extensive discussion of the sociological issue of identity can be found in: T. Paleczny, *Socjologia tożsamości*, Kraków 2008.

2   M. Castells, *Siła tożsamości*, Warszawa 2009, p. 68.

3   L. Wolff, *Idea Galicji. Historia i fantazja w kulturze politycznej Habsburgów*, Kraków 2020.

4   Cf. J. Wierzejska, *Idea Galicji po(st)granicznej w ukraińskim i polskim dyskursie postkolonialnym. Na przykładzie eseistyki Jurija Andruchowycza i Andrzeja Stasiuka*, "Teksty Drugie" (2014) 6, pp. 283–304.

of social integration and assimilation in Opole Silesia in the context of sociological reflection on changes in the concept of the "homeland."[5] For Ossowski, the region is

> the correlate of the regional collectivity. A regional collectivity is a territorial collectivity that has a sense of its own identity to a greater or lesser extent, but does not consider itself a nation; in other words, its members do not try to ascribe to their collectivity the attributes of a nation. Typically, such a community is a component of some national community. Members of the regional community, the Polish Highlanders or inhabitants of the Kurpie region, the Burgundians or the Gascons can feel at the same time patriots of their region and patriots of the national homeland. In the more remote parts of Europe, or in some borderlands with a complicated history, it happens, however, that the inhabitants do not reach beyond the regional bond, not having, as it was said, a national sense.[6]

The notion of "taming" a new place of residence and building a sense of identity linked with it was recognised by Zygmunt Dulczewski.[7] In reference to the processes of shaping new communities in the Western Territories of Poland, he introduced the concept of "autochthonization," by which he means the culmination of a process of identity formation beginning with social adaptation to a new environment and moving through various stages, such as stabilisation, a sense of local bonding, social integration, and the growth of local patriotism (regionalism), all ultimately culminating in full autochthonization.

Krzysztof Kwaśniewski examines the autochthonization process in relation to the concept of a private and ideological homeland.

> The return to the national territory and ideological homeland, which so far did not include a private homeland (as in the case of those settling in the Western Territories after 1945), is the starting point for the most typical autochthonization process. If such a newly inhabited territory has indigenous, regional cultural traditions, represented by native population groups (such as in Opole Silesia), autochthonization of immigrant population is carried out in the most harmonious way by acculturation to these local traditions. If, like some other areas of the Western Territories of Poland, this territory is entirely newly settled, then the newcomers face a difficult and long-term task not only of creating their private homeland here, but also of creating, in reference to the cultural landscape and history of the region, a new, regional cultural identity. This identity as a frame of reference only allows for full autochthonization."[8]

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5   Cf. S. Ossowski, *Zagadnienia więzi regionalnej i więzi rodzinnej na Śląsku Opolskim*, "Przegląd Socjologiczny" 9 (1947).

6   Ibidem, p. 73.

7   Z. Dulczewski, *Autochtonizacja ludności na Ziemiach Zachodnich*, in: idem (ed.), *Tworzenie się nowego społeczeństwa na Ziemiach Zachodnich*, Poznań 1961, pp. 13–67.

8   K. Kwaśniewski, *Autochtonizm i autochtonizacja*, "Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny" 49 (1987) 1.

Another very interesting analysis is related to the Western and Northern Territories of Poland, where a sense of regional identity is combined with the concept of a socio-cultural "borderland." The borderland is a special area where processes of diffusion, radiation, and crossing of various kinds of influences occur. Linguistic, cultural, economic and civilisational blending take place there. As a result, inhabitants of the borderland find certain elements from different cultural circles more attractive than others. This results in individual and group dilemmas related to defining one's own identity. In this way, the identity of the inhabitants of the borderland becomes multicultural and more "fuzzy" than that of ethnically homogeneous regions. In the post-war period of the Polish People's Republic, when state borders were practically closed, cultural exchange between neighbouring societies was largely limited, but processes typical of the borderland undoubtedly occurred. The Western and Northern Territories of Poland are one example of this. For many researchers, the notion of the borderland, emphasising as it does a high degree of socio-cultural heterogeneity, became an attractive intellectual proposition as it allowed understanding not only of the linked processes of social integration and territorial identification, but also of the processes of social *dis*integration and limited regional identification among the inhabitants of the Western and Northern Territories of Poland.[9]

Issues of regional identity are not limited to sociological research solely in the Western and Northern Territories of Poland. In fact, studies on regional identity proliferate in Upper Silesia,[10] Lower Silesia,[11] the Poznań region,[12] Lesser Poland,[13] Mazury[14] and the Lublin region.[15] In these works, regional identity emphasises social, symbolic, cultural, economic and topographic features specific to a given area, distinguishing it from other areas. In all cases, a high degree of importance is attached to the history of the formation of the regional community.

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[9] Cf.: Z. Staszczak, *Pogranicze polsko-niemieckie jako pogranicze etnograficzne*, Poznań 1978; J. Chlebowczyk, *Procesy narodotwórcze we wschodniej Europie Środkowej w dobie kapitalizmu*, Warszawa 1973; A. Sakson, *Mazurzy. Społeczność pogranicza*, Poznań 1990.

[10] Z. Rykiel, *Badania świadomości regionalnej – przykład regionu katowickiego*, "Przegląd Geograficzny" 57 (1985) 1–2, pp. 37–58.

[11] G. Rak, *Percepcja przestrzeni regionalnej*, Wrocław 2013.

[12] R. Matykowski, *Rola świadomości regionalnej w kształtowaniu granic regionu poznańskiego*, in: T. Czyż (ed.), *Podstawy regionalizacji geograficznej*, Poznań 1996, pp. 127–140.

[13] G. Prawelska-Skrzypek, *Świadomość regionalna w Małopolsce – studium empiryczne*, in: eadem (ed.), *Małopolska regionalna wspólnota interesów*, Nowy Sącz 1996, pp. 41–59.

[14] W. Łukowski, *Społeczne tworzenie ojczyzn. Studium tożsamości mieszkańców Mazur*, Warszawa 2002.

[15] M. Dziekanowska, *Poczucie tożsamości regionalnej mieszkańców Lubelszczyzny*, Lublin 2015.

2. The historical context of the regional identity of Western Pomerania

One of the basic issues regarding the formation of regional identity in Western Pomerania relates to settlement processes after the end of World War II, which significantly influenced the shape of the regional community and its internal cohesion. The most complete data on the settlement structure of Western Pomerania come from the National Census conducted in 1950. Data presented in this paper is sourced from this census.[16] Information on the territorial origins of the population was compiled on the basis of a question included in the census sheet about people's place of residence in August 1939.

> Children born between then and the day of the census were added to their mothers, thus creating a certain statistical fiction, justified by the desire to obtain compact groups, regardless of the wartime fate of people. The justification for putting the matter in this way is also the fact that, for instance, a child of people taken from Kielce to work in Germany and born there will rather show the characteristics of the mentality of parents since it is difficult to expect an environment in the first years of life (the oldest children counted among mothers were 11 years old).[17]

When compiling the data, the Central Statistical Office divided pre-war places of residence according to the provincial administrative divisions in force at that time. Moreover, people who came from abroad, including the USSR (mainly from areas which in 1939 were part of the Polish State, i.e., Ukraine and Western Belarus, Germany, France and other countries), were distinguished in the census data. The census did not reflect information on national composition or origins of indigenous people already in the Western Territories, who were of native Polish and German origin.

In the then Szczecin and Koszalin provinces, both of which exceeded the physical area of the present West Pomeranian province, there were 529,300 and 518,400 inhabitants respectively. The autochthonous population accounted for 9.5% in Koszalin and 3.2% in Szczecin. Displaced persons who, according to the then nomenclature were those born within the borders of Poland after 1945, constituted 64.4% of the total population of the Koszalin province and 65% of the population of the Szczecin province. The category of "repatriates," (i.e., people from the former borderland provinces that did not belong to Poland after 1945), comprised 24.3% of the inhabitants of the Koszalin province and 30.3% of the inhabitants of the Szczecin province. In this respect, less populous communities of "Borderlanders" were

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16   L. Kosiński, *Pochodzenie terytorialne ludności Ziem Zachodnich 1950 r.*, Warszawa 1960.

17   Ibidem, p. 3.

found in the Opolskie (23.3%), Gdańsk (19.5%) and Katowice provinces (in the part annexed after 1945, 15.9% of the inhabitants were repatriates). Higher proportions of repatriates and re-emigrants were recorded in the Wrocław (39.9%) and Zielona Góra (43.7%) provinces. All things considered, about 30% of the current inhabitants of the West Pomeranian province originated from the areas annexed to the USSR after 1945.

According to Irena Machaj, who has studied the identity of inhabitants of the eastern and western borderlands of Poland, those living in the western borderland area are significantly different in terms of their identity compared with inhabitants of the eastern borderland.[18] As he writes: "Migrants coming from various regions of the country, but mainly from poor and civilizationally backward rural environments, in the settled areas began to show significant dynamics of their own activity, readiness to face challenges, self-confidence and openness to change."[19] According to the author, these features, and especially their quest for social advancement, were strongly articulated during the systemic transformation of the 1990s. It is their development of such a specific identity that underpins the success of inhabitants of the western borderland in adapting to changing conditions. Their adaptation to systemic changes and economic challenges, and their sense of entrepreneurship, were vastly more successful than the inhabitants of the eastern borderland of Poland.

To this day, territorial origin plays an important role among inhabitants of Western Pomerania. To a large extent, the processes of building local and regional identity are rooted in broader reference to the borderland, Greater Poland, Lesser Poland, or the Mazovian regions. References to pioneer and settler identity are also very strong. Yet this issue has lost its currency because, as Zbigniew Kurcz writes, "From the beginning of the 1990s, when the political transformation was launched and the free market returned, and the united Germany confirmed the existing border, the political myth of the Recovered Territories lost its importance, organising social life in this area so far."[20]

References to the pioneer times lose their power also in connection with the ongoing processes of social integration and disintegration. This is best illustrated by the processes of matrimonial selection, which do not show a regional pattern.[21]

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18 I. Machaj, *Społeczno-kulturowe konteksty tożsamości mieszkańców wschodniego i zachodniego pogranicza Polski*, Warszawa 2005.

19 Ibidem, p. 267.

20 Z. Kurcz, *Ziemie Odzyskane i ziemie rozsprzedane. Konflikt o sprzedaż ziemi w województwie zachodniopomorskim*, in: *Pogranicza. Księga jubileuszowa Profesora Andrzeja Sadowskiego*, Collective work edited by M. Bieńkowska and W. Żelazny, Białystok 2005, p. 218.

21 Cf. H. Mrzygłód, *Dobór małżeński w rodzinach marynarzy*, Szczecin 1997.

3. Factors constituting the regional and local identity of the farming population of Western Pomerania

The countryside and the city are often juxtaposed in traditional sociological models. The countryside is characterised as the mainstay of tradition, while the city represents and embodies modernity. The countryside appears as an area of stability and constancy, while the city is viewed as dynamic and fast changing. Sense of identity aligns with these characteristics: identity in the countryside is traditional and stable, while identity associated with the city is changeable and modern.

Such an opposition is deeply rooted in sociology, both theoretically and empirically. As noted by Izabella Bukraba-Rylska[22], the Polish understanding of the concept of *village* differs from the German concept of *Gemeinschaft* or the American concept of a local *community*, but in each case "features by means of which these constructs were described were sometimes very similar, or even the same, that individual terms were used interchangeably, or the use of the same name was accompanied by different definitions of it."[23] However, the use of the rural-urban continuum in the description of local communities, which was very common in the 20th century, over time gave way to other theoretical constructs (e.g., the concept of local activities, social network analysis, and conflict theory). Nevertheless, the social bond based on common identification and identity has always remained the main focus of analysis.

The distinction between rural and urban areas is important for identity processes in Western Pomerania and other regions of the Western and Northern Territories, especially when taking into account historical factors. A historical peculiarity is the fact that the population changed in Western Pomerania after World War II. Another factor, whose sociological consequences cannot be overestimated, is the starting point from which local communities in the countryside were formed in 1945. In this case, we are dealing with almost laboratory conditions for the formation of social bonds and their confrontation with factors disintegrating rural communities.

The perspective that raises the microsocial dimension in the context of state policy has a deep empirical justification.[24] It found expression in research on rural communities in Western Pomerania after 2005, especially in the monographic study of the rural community of Imno.[25] In the memoirs collected at that time,

22   I. Bukraba-Rylska, *Socjologia wsi polskiej*, Warszawa 2008, p. 46.

23   J. Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej*, Warszawa 2002, p. 597.

24   Cf. J. Styk, *Chłopi i wieś polska w perspektywie socjologicznej i historycznej*, Lublin 1999.

25   The studies concerned the diagnosis of the social situation of villages that joined the Leader+ Pilot Program under the Rural Development Programme. Monographic research was carried

the description of transformations of the social life of the village was ordered by important events that periodised the history of the community. Collectivisation, compulsory deliveries, setting up farmer's circles, the introduction of free healthcare, convenient loans for the development of agricultural production, and goods vouchers for the sale of food products were important and strongly influencing instruments of state policy, all of which are still today identified in the collective consciousness of rural residents.[26]

In the next part of the discussion, we will focus on four determinants which shape territorial identity in Western Pomerania: (1) the social locality of an inhabited area; (2) the history of the community inhabiting it; (3) adaptation to foreign cultural influence and resources; and (4) the course of the integration process.

Locality

Social locality, in the sociological sense of the term, should be treated as one of the factors shaping collective identity. The theoretical tradition in sociology combines the concept of locality with several attributes, which most often include a common territory with bonding potential, the nature of interactions between individuals, and the fact that basic social needs are met within a territorial community. Let us add to this the indicator of social bonds associated with belonging to the peasant class, confirming the methodological legitimacy of the proposed approach.

out in Imno. The results of research in rural communities are presented, among others, in the following publications: W. Durka, B. Klepajczuk, S. Kołodziejczak, A. Terelak, *Liderzy lokalni w procesie odnowy wsi. Odniesienia socjologiczne*, in: A.K. Piasecki (ed.), *Model przywództwa: wymiar lokalny, krajowy, międzynarodowy*, Kraków 2006, pp. 563–575; A. Bartoszek, W. Durka, B. Klepajczuk, S. Kołodziejczak, A. Terelak, *Funkcje edukacji obywatelskiej w kształtowaniu lokalnych enklaw aktywności (na przykładzie interwencji socjologicznej)*, in: L. Gołdyka, I. Machaj (eds.), *Enklawy życia społecznego*, Szczecin 2007 (Rozprawy i Studia (745) 671), pp. 549–566; W. Durka, B. Klepajczuk, S. Kołodziejczak, A. Terelak, *Partycypacja społeczna jako czynnik konkurencyjności regionów. Liderzy lokalni wobec wyzwań rozwojowych wsi*, in: M. Szczepański, K. Bierwiaczonek, T. Nawrocki (eds.), *Kapitały ludzkie i społeczne a konkurencyjność regionów*, Katowice 2008 (Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego 2578), pp. 264–283; and also: S. Kołodziejczak, A. Terelak, *Wspólnota działania. Rozwój podmiotowości społeczności lokalnych na Pomorzu Zachodnim*, in: G. Skąpska, M.S. Szczepański, Ż. Stasieniuk (eds.), *Co po kryzysie?*, Warszawa 2016.

26 The presented hypothesis is the result of many hours of discussions with Bolesław Klepajczuk, a sociologist from the University of Szczecin who died prematurely. This hypothesis is also confirmed nowadays, since the rural electorate was recognised as playing a decisive part in the result of the parliamentary elections. Cf. T. Żukowski, *Czy polityka społeczna ma wpływ na polskie wybory? Kilka hipotez na temat wpływu polityki społecznej na aktywność i preferencje mieszkańców polskiej wsi (na podstawie wyborów do Sejmu z września 2001 r.)*, "Problemy Polityki Społecznej" (2002) 4, pp. 151–165.

Processes of integration and disintegration of social ties in rural communities were subject to dual influences. On the one hand, important historical processes undeniably had an impact. On the other, social ties were clearly affected by interactions inherent in the farming profession. As in any relationship of this kind, which is of a processual nature, it is difficult to define the boundary between effect and cause. Simply, the nature of the interaction, based on the specificity of the farmer's work, autonomously determines the formation of specific bonds within rural communities. In this way, cooperative ties are created, which integrate the traditional peasant community. Similarly, the need for mutual assistance has a stabilising effect on neighbourly ties.

History

The historical phenomena that determine the building of local and regional identity in rural communities in this territory include:
– top-down formation and imposition of the agricultural system;
– migrations related to the settlement of Western Pomerania;
– rural-urban migrations; and
– derivatives of the industrialisation process that alter traditional ways of fulfilling peasants' working role.

Rural communities in the process of forming the socio-economic system are the subjects, not the object, of the indicated historical processes. In each of these historical determinants, there are elements of both integration and disintegration. The distribution of emphasis between one process and the other depends on the reaction of the rural population to the indicated historical phenomenon the so-called socialist industrialisation illustrates this thesis. Regardless of the ideological premises, this form of industrialisation undoubtedly stimulated technical progress and intensified agricultural production. Additionally, it spawned rural-urban migration processes. These, in turn, led to the disintegration of traditional rural communities, triggering the phenomenon of social anomie. The specific logic of the reaction of rural communities to the impetus of historical and political processes should be taken into account here. On the one hand, they collided with the traditional peasant ethos and, on the other, they encountered resistance in the form of social awareness. In this matter, it was difficult to reconcile the economic legitimacy of collectivisation of agriculture with the experience of this form of farming, which was undertaken by peasants displaced from the territories seized by the USSR after September 17, 1939.

To illustrate the place of rural communities on the continuum between integration and disintegration, I shall use the notion of "territorial community" as conceptualised by Barry Wellman. In his thesis, territorial communities are transformed

from natural categories into potential categories. With the probability of positive verification, we can formulate a hypothesis that the rural local community in the first post-war years in Western Pomerania, before it developed a sense of a natural territorial community, first existed as a potential territorial community. In the light of this hypothesis, the question about the identity functions of the common territory seems to be fundamental. In order to assess this, we will assume that the settlement of the so-called reclaimed lands was carried out in the face of two types of coercion. The first, of a political nature, resulted from the loss of eastern territories by Poland. The second, was economic coercion in the form of the wave of migration from central Poland. For the sake of historical truth, it is worth noting the adventurous or looting motivations of migrants for moving to Western Pomerania.

The second important point is that the compulsion to migrate was conducive to the formation of awareness of territorial strangeness. This state was intensified by the feeling of uncertainty and temporary settlement, especially strong in the so-called repatriates from the east. The dissimilarity of the infrastructure and natural aspects of the new space delayed the development of a sense of territorial identification. The foreignness of the new territory was underpinned by the widespread belief in the injustice of the forced displacement of one's own countrymen and the German population. In such a historical context, there was often a sense of community among the displaced Germans.

Adaptation

The slow process of forming a territorial community among the rural population was caused mainly by three important aspects of space:
– occupied household;
– land as a workshop; and
– institutionally sanctioned boundaries of locality (villages, parishes, and communes).

The mechanism of creating a sense of territorial community was based on assigning specific meanings to the above-mentioned components of space, additionally combining the human and material contexts.[27]

Typically, significance is given to the components of a common space under the influence of the tradition that preserves and transmits the memory of the territory. In the case of migration to Western Pomerania, we are dealing with a syndrome of territory devoid of historical memory. Consciousness, in contrast, stores

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27 Cf. J. Wódz, *Społeczności lokalne w świetle niektórych koncepcji tzw. socjologii życia codziennego*, in: idem (ed.), *Społeczności lokalne. Szkice socjologiczne*, Katowice 1986.

an increasingly idealised space that was previously abandoned under a sense of compulsion. This is why one's own past, or that of those closest to one, acquires spatial parameters, as long as one's memory goes back before the time of departure for Western Pomerania. For a long time, the formation of a sense of identification with the new territory overcame the resistance of matter in the form of memories and nostalgia for the lost private homeland. However, the assignment of significance to specific components of the territory was made without the participation of historical memory and tradition – factors that are all the more relevant in the traditional local community. The new space, in the first stage of migrants' adaptation, was not a factor that contributed to building a sense of territorial community, yet the sense of a similar attitude to the new territory took on integrating importance.

It was through the traditional aspects of farm work that integrative tendencies emerged. These, in turn, were transferred to social ties. The land, which is a place of work and a source of livelihood, became a binding factor which contributed towards overcoming the sense of territorial strangeness. Identification with one's own workplace was transferred to identification with one's own village, commune, or parish. Institutional ties, in turn, increased the sense of separateness of one's own local community. The material culture left by the Germans, which was adapted over time to a greater or lesser extent, ceased to have a depressing effect. However, it led to a unique "civilisational leap" of the rural local community. The land and the household, treated over time as one's own, lost the attribute of being temporary. As components shaping the territorial order, they gained the importance enjoyed in the traditional peasant ethos. The peasant consciousness began to dominate over the consciousness of the forced immigrant. In all probability, this moment became a turning point in the adaptation process because all other bonding components of the rural social space began to free themselves from the destructive influence of the sense of territorial strangeness. In contrast, the "tamed" space eliminated the entire baggage of fears and the sense of threat. In the peasant consciousness, there was a rationalisation of the effects of historical necessity – or, in other words, historical coercion. Probably only in such a situation could the arguments of state propaganda, such as "we didn't come here, we came back," be approved.

Religious life was an important mechanism of integration and a trigger for the development of bonds. The diaries of Szczecin families are a very rich source of information here. The church became an important bond-forming factor and a focal point for national identification. It quite clearly weakened the processes of social disintegration. By guarding the axionormative order, the church preserved

the atrophied historical consciousness. It created the first legitimate and historically identifiable formula for integration and overcoming cultural differences. Sense of religious affiliation and identification with the parish were the earliest triggers in the process of shaping community identity. The above-mentioned cultural differences of newcomers to the West Pomeranian countryside were mainly related to differences in dialect and customs – or, more broadly, the culture of everyday life. The hermetic nature of regional groups was softened, and their mutual penetration progressed thanks to the integrating function of the church and other institutions of public life. In rural communities, intermarriage reduced the sense of regional dissimilarity and diminished stereotypical perceptions of "strangers."

Integration phases

Integration occurred through normal demographic processes. The first generation of children born and brought up was rather deprived of the sense of regional distinctiveness felt by their own parents and the resulting complexes.

The integrative role of political factors, foremost among which was the process of forced collectivisation, deserves attention. We argue that in its time, forced collectivisation became the source of so-called negative integration. The sense of professional identity, rebuilt after 1945, was confronted with the sense of threat to material existence and the economic futility of collective ownership and organisation of work in agriculture. The reaction to forced collectivisation was integration against the authorities.

In contrast, the sources of integration processes in the years between 1956 and 1970 can be traced to Władysław Gomułka's instability. Thanks to agricultural policies promoted by the state, cooperative ties within rural local communities also developed during this period. As a result, the stability of familial peasant farms was strengthened. Additionally, the state created a system of incentives for peasants to participate in cooperative institutions. Such a role was played by Agricultural Associations developed after 1956. Cooperative ties developed spontaneously on the basis of, and alongside, neighbourly and local ties. The low level of mechanisation of work in individual farming forced the need for cooperation, especially when some field work was intensified. The trend of stabilisation developed in the 1960s made rural communities egalitarian. Although the extensive system of rendering the peasant workplace dependent on state institutions did not allow the capitalisation of peasant farms, it did provide some respite after the period of forced collectivisation. Sociological studies of the conditions of rural communities in the 1960s generally concluded that this was the period of the highest level of internal integration of local communities in the post-war history of rural Western Pomerania.

In the 1970s, stabilisation was replaced by timid attempts at mercantilization of the peasant economy. The attempts would initiate new changes within rural communities. The emergence of specialist farms, agricultural complexes, and large farmlands intensified property differentiation in rural communities.

The 1980s brought relatively high prosperity to the West Pomeranian countryside. Farmers received numerous incentives to increase farming efficiency. Market shortages affected the priorities of the food economy of the People's Republic of Poland. For the first time since 1945, farmers' efforts were appreciated and recognised in the mass media.

At the same time, general civilisational processes were taking place. Thanks to technological progress, cooperative ties were reduced. Farms became autonomous, and local communities were subject to similar processes. There was a transition from a natural territorial community to a potential territorial community, which seems to have been consolidated in the systemic transformation that began after 1989.

However, the systemic transformation did not spare farmers. The liberalisation of prices in the agricultural market during the reign of Mieczysław F. Rakowski favoured farmers in the very short term, but it soon turned out that Poland's agricultural economy was threatened by this competition. Regulated and official prices for agricultural products, which are favourable for farmers, were replaced by minimum prices and, finally, by contractual prices. The market was completely freed from any regulations, as a result of which agricultural producers were forced to adapt their economy to market requirements.

Ultimately, the early period of transformation was not kind to farmers. Previously concluded loans lost preferential privilege, which in a relatively short period of time led to avalanche bankruptcies of medium and large farms. The resulting dissatisfaction led to the development of the farmers' self-defence movement, which eventually became a parliamentary political party in 2021. However, the activity of farmers, especially from the area of Western Pomerania, was not a manifestation of local or territorial bonds, but was provoked rather by a sense of community of economic interests. We are also currently observing radicalisation of agricultural producers' demands in connection with the transfer of cereals from war-torn Ukraine.

A new stage of shaping social ties in rural areas was marked by the processes of Poland's integration with the European Union. As Arkadiusz Michalak[28] observed, this integration was a difficult challenge. Writing about the social importance

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28 A. Michalak, *Rolnictwo i społeczności wiejskie Pomorza Zachodniego u progu integracji europejskiej*, in: idem (ed.), *Socjologiczne oblicza europejskości Pomorza Zachodniego*, Szczecin 2002.

of the farming economy, he notes that "[t]he agrarian structure inherited from the period of planned economy was characterised by a high production potential of large-area farms. These farms performed not only economic functions, but also social and cultural ones."[29]

In relation to peasant communities, programmes strengthening social integration had already appeared in the pre-accession period. These programmes were most often aimed directly at rural residents.

After Poland's accession to the European Union, funding for agriculture and rural areas further increased, providing a strong stimulus for development. As a result, the West Pomeranian village is presently experiencing something of a renewal. One of the characteristic strengths of farmers is their ability to unify against external threats, which of course has potential for identity development. Currently, in 2023, a particular threat to farmers is the uncontrolled importation of grain from war-torn Ukraine, as well as the "Green Transformation" which is to be implemented as part of the European Green Deal. It is expected that the "Green Transition" will consume 40% of the expenditure envisaged for the Common Agricultural Policy between 2021 and 2027, mainly for the challenges caused by climate change. Other likely considerations will be a progressive decline in biodiversity in Europe, the ageing of the farming community, out-migration of young people from farming areas, and declining productivity of agricultural land. The transformation is also to guarantee a decent level of income for farming families. Such top-down actions interfering with the activities of individual farms may cause resistance among farmers and social protests, which in turn may increase farmers' social activity and involvement in politics.

Conclusion

Issues related to regional identification and identity in rural areas are no longer popular subjects in contemporary sociological research. Notwithstanding this, the strength of regional identity experienced by residents determines levels of social activity, the quality of social integration, the human and social capital of the region, and – indirectly – the quality of life of its inhabitants.

Polish occupation of Western Pomerania was relatively recent, dating back less than 80 years. Processes associated with creating a new regional identity have yet to be completed. This is clearly evident in the example of rural communities, which remain heterogeneous in respect of origin, politics, religion, ethnicity, culture, economics, demography, health, morality and many other factors.

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29   Ibidem, p. 30.

The analysis conducted in this paper has demonstrated the need to undertake further studies on identification and territorial identity among inhabitants of rural areas of Western Pomerania.

Apart from farmers, it is undoubtedly necessary to analyse other social categories which are part of rural communities, two of which demand particular attention. First, it is relevant to undertake research on the situation of former state-owned farm employees, their families, and subsequent generations still living on former state-owned farms. What is particularly interesting are their current socio--professional situations and their attitudes towards the local and regional community. So-called "new villagers" make up the second category that requires special research. This category comprises rural residents working in non-agricultural sectors of the economy, usually in the city. They bring new ways of life to the community that strongly impact local identity. The category also includes people from the traditional Polish community who comprise the local elites and work mainly in the public sector and business.

Finally, analysis of regional identity in the contemporary countryside must take into account public institutions such as local government, municipal offices, educational institutions, and non-governmental organisations. All of these exert an overwhelming influence on the shape of social relations in communities located within rural territories.

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PROBLEMS OF FORMATION OF REGIONAL IDENTITY AMONG RURAL RESIDENTS OF WESTERN POMERANIA. A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Summary

The paper is an attempt to sketch, from a sociological perspective, processes of regional identity formation in rural areas of Western Pomerania after 1945. Part of the so-called Western and Northern Territories of Poland, West Pomerania experienced one of the biggest social

experiments of the 20th century. Settlers in the area included Germans who fled the Soviet Army and were displaced in the post-war period, and Poles from various regions of the country, including about 40% of the inhabitants of the eastern areas of the former Republic of Poland that were incorporated into the USSR. The residents of these areas constituted a mosaic of diverse local and regional identities. Local and regional communities were subject to processes of adaptation and social integration. As a result of these processes, a new identity was borne among inhabitants based primarily on their current place of residence. The article consists of an introduction, three parts, and a conclusion. The first part considers the concept of regional identity with particular reference to various related concepts formulated in Polish and world sociology. The second part focuses on the post-war history of Western Pomerania, emphasising the settlement processes affecting individual and group identification within the area. Finally, the third part attempts a multifaceted description of the local and regional identity of farmers in the province of Western Pomerania, who are the most traditional category of rural resident there. The analysis excludes other categories of rural resident, including former state farm workers, teachers, public administration officials, social welfare and health-care workers, and people who work in cities but live in the countryside. These other categories will be addressed in an ensuing article.

Keywords: rural sociology, regional identity, territorial communities, Western and Northern Territories of Poland

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