

STRESZCZENIE ROZPRAWY DOKTORSKIEJ W JĘZYKU ANGIELSKIM

Memory of the landscape of depopulated localities from the polish part of the former East Prussia – the material dimension of the broken continuity of settlement

Until the end of the Second World War, Warmia, Masuria, and some of Powiśle were part of the Province of East Prussia – an exclave of the German Reich. The 1945 alteration in their territorial affiliation and, especially, the socio-political consequences of that alteration, caused a number of changes in the cultural landscape there. One of the leading processes of that was the gradual depopulation of localities, resulting in the disappearance of settlement from many of them.

The subject of the doctoral dissertation are the transformations of rural areas of settlement units abandoned between 1944 and 2020, located in the part of former East Prussia that was incorporated into Poland in 1945. The main objectives were to identify the depopulated localities in the research area, and then to determine the types, degrees, and directions of transformation of their spaces.

The first stage of the research primarily involved library and archive searches, aimed at determining the circumstances of the localities' depopulation in the set time range. A key part of this stage was comparative analysis of archival and current cartographic materials: topographic maps and aerial photographs. On the basis of said analysis, uninhabited localities were identified.

The second stage of the research involved detailed analyses. These concerned, inter alia, distribution of the depopulated localities, and general characteristics of their particular morphological types. Also, multi-layered studies were carried out on their individual components: remnants of homesteads, cemeteries, military buildings, as well as the role of vegetation in present-day landscape identification of the abandoned localities. In order to identify and document the processes taking place in the localities after the continuity of habitation had been interrupted, on-site studies were carried out in selected ones. Methods of non-invasive archaeological on-site prospection were applied, e.g.: taking geo-radar measurements, analyzing the results of airborne laser scanning, preparing photographic and drawing documentation of relics. During the research, material remnants of settlement structures were registered, based on which it is possible to deduce the character of both natural and anthropogenic processes occurring within them.

In the areas of former East Prussia covered by the analysis, there are now about 800 abandoned localities that are integral components of the landscape of today's Warmia, Masuria, and Powiśle. It is noticeable that they are more concentrated in the northern counties of the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, where, before the Second World War, there were the greatest numbers of functioning landed estates, which after 1945 quickly got robbed or re-abandoned by people brought to those areas. Similarly, in the south of former East Prussia, in areas bordering Kurpie and Mazovia, due to high crime rates and the people's awareness of the instability of the political situation, settlement had a temporary nature.

Statistical and spatial analyses of those localities, the results of which are presented in the dissertation, show that – as a result of the socio-political transformations of the 20th

century – some major changes occurred in the landscape. The settlement network of those areas became greatly impoverished as a result of the disappearance of many small localities (587 in total), including, among others, the following: 286 manor houses and manor farms, 92 foresters' lodges. Complete depopulation was also the fate of 201 villages, settlements, and hamlets. This was a consequence of a series of events and processes initiated by the violent escape of local people from East Prussia at the end of World War II. Many of the localities had already been completely destroyed towards the end of the war, and were not settled after it ended. Villages were deserted also as a result of post-war migrations and displacement of Germans and Masurians. The fact of bringing new settlers to those areas, to whom the encountered landscape seemed alien, did not compensate for the post-war population deficit. The sense of temporariness felt by the relocated people, the numerous robberies committed by both Red Army soldiers and the incoming civilians, made it virtually impossible to settle down. Feuds that arose between various groups of settlers and tense relations with the local authorities were yet another serious obstacle. To make things worse, farming problems quickly emerged due to, inter alia, a lack of agricultural machinery or animals such as horses and cows. All of these factors resulted in the abandonment of farms, which happened gradually over several decades. Former landed estates would collapse also due to the political transformation of the 1990s when, after state-owned farms (*Państwowe Gospodarstwo Rolne, PGR*) had been closed down, the exhausted buildings gradually fell into ruin as a result of discontinuation of production activities.

Relics of abandoned localities are clearly visible in the contemporary landscape. These include the ruins of old manor houses and manor farm buildings, as well as the remnants of homesteads of depopulated villages. To this day, there mainly remain foundations of buildings, cobbled roads, cemeteries, as well as traces of warfare such as trenches and bomb craters. The most distinctive feature of the landscape of the depopulated localities is the different vegetation – mainly orchards and houseplants that have run wild and now lushly grow where farms used to be. From a distance, the areas of such localities can often be seen as isolated clusters of high greenery co-formed by, among others, age-old trees growing within abandoned homesteads and along former roads. The type and condition of identified preserved settlement remnants are proof of rapid devastation of their structures and their incessant transformations. Said transformations occur not only as a result of human activity (e.g. demolition of buildings, transformation of homesteads into arable land, storage of waste in abandoned villages), but also due to natural processes (intensive succession of vegetation, physical weathering of building remnants). The latter processes take place with particular intensity in the areas of old forest settlements, especially those located in the Pisz Forest. In many cases, recognition of material relics was possible only thanks to analysis of airborne laser scanning results. On their basis, remnants that have their own forms were identified, e.g., hollows, pieces of building walls, which remain unnoticed during on-site prospection because of dense undergrowth.

Presence of hundreds of abandoned localities identified in the Warmia-Masuria Voivodeship, which got depopulated after the end of the Second World War, suggests that the transformations of the landscape in those areas took place on a huge scale. Mass migrations and displacements of people led to an interruption of cultural continuity, due to which the new inhabitants intensively interfered in the space around them. Whatever did not get destroyed

during the war or shortly afterwards, was subjected to further exploiting and/or ruining. The villages would slowly lose their historical character. Today, devastated manor houses are neighbored by post-PGR working-class concrete housing developments. In places where people live near historical buildings, it is evident that their cultural and historical value is starting to be noticed. Regrettably, however, often those are mere ruins that are impossible to 'resurrect'. Farther away from inhabited areas – among fields and forests – there remain old, nameless localities – fishing settlements, foresters' lodges, villages. Mere fragments of history can be read from what remains – stones left where there used to be houses, a few crosses in a family cemetery, pieces of pottery and tiles from stoves, an old oak that once stood in the center of a village square.