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## Reconstructing Stability: The Role of Education in Post-Conflict Territorial Transitions - A Case Study of Szczecin After World War II

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**Abstract:**

**Purpose:** The aim of the article is to attempt to create a collective portrait of teachers in the conditions of population shifts on the Polish-German borderland after World War II.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** The method involves statistical analysis of data from archival materials, memoirs of participants, and literature allowing for the creation of a collective portrait of the community. The argumentation is based on the analysis of the collective of teachers of the first high school in Szczecin established after World War II. The findings allow for generalizations to be made about the entire teaching community, both in Polish territories and other areas affected by population exchange due to armed conflict.

**Conclusions:** The presented example allows us to conclude that the establishment of educational institutions is essential for creating conditions for settlement, but at the same time, teachers from settlement groups exhibit similar characteristics to the entire migratory population.

**Practical implications:** Practical implications for decision-makers and researchers of migration processes and the effectiveness of state policy in shaping social structures.

**Originality/value:** The presented issue has not been subject to scientific analysis before.

**Keywords:** Education, teachers, migratory society, Szczecin.

**JEL Classification:** I24, I28, N45, P48, H56, O15.

**Paper type:** Research article.

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## **1. Introduction**

World War II brought about fundamental territorial shifts in Europe, particularly affecting the eastern German lands. For Poland and the USSR, Germany lost nearly 120,000 km<sup>2</sup> of territory, mostly inhabited by German population, which was decided upon complete expulsion at the Potsdam Conference. This meant the necessity of total population exchange and the establishment of new political, administrative, and social structures by the resettled new population in the described areas.

The new post-war Polish-German border was established along the Oder and Neisse rivers. Szczecin was a unique city in this regard. It lies on both banks of the Oder, so the processes of settlement and development here had an additional political significance. The rapid progress of these processes was particularly important for Poland due to the approaching – as it was assumed – peace conference, where Polish territorial acquisitions had to be confirmed.

A key condition for launching the economy, administration, and social institutions was the prompt acquisition of specialist personnel capable of leading these processes. An additional problem was the fact that the vast majority of incoming settlers were relatively young and had a low level of education.

These factors forced the Polish authorities to promptly launch the educational system, especially at the secondary level. Its graduates were needed in the economy, administration, culture, healthcare, and the new schools provided an opportunity to supplement education for those who could not attend school during the years 1939-1945 due to the liquidation of Polish education in the areas occupied by Germany and the USSR.

A prerequisite for the swift establishment of schools was the acquisition of a qualified teaching staff. During the war, the Polish education system lost nearly 10,000 qualified teachers overall, with 1,194 of them working in secondary schools (Walczak, 1995). Some of the survivors remained in emigration, while the vast majority were involved in the establishment of the education system in central Poland.

Therefore, a small group of teachers settled in Szczecin faced particularly challenging tasks. The presented research findings can be used for comparative analysis with other areas of Europe where fundamental territorial changes and mass population movements occurred.

## **2. Literature Review**

The issue of building the education system in Szczecin after World War II has been analyzed multiple times by historians. In the broader context of the education

system's role in the construction of society's foundations immediately after World War II, the findings of Piotr Zaremba (1977; 1986; 1996), Kazimierz Kozłowski (2012), Jan Muzekamp (2012), and Katarzyna Rembacka (2020) are particularly useful.

Directly focusing on education, works by Lucyna Turek-Kwiatkowska (1975; 1977; 1998; 2007), Joanna Król (2005; 2009), Kazimierz Kozłowski (1994), Władysław Nowotniak (1998), Czesław Plewka (2003; 2005; 2012; 2020) are notable.

However, they mainly address organizational development, with little emphasis on the teaching staff. In this regard, the research of Adam Makowski (1991), Władysław Pryniewicz (1975), Bruno Taydelt (1975), and Jan Sarosiek (1975) is helpful.

A separate chapter is dedicated to studies on Janina Szczerska, the founder and first headmistress of the First High School in Szczecin, one of the most important women in Szczecin's education. Among the key works in this group are publications by Anna Lew-Machniak (2017), Małgorzata Machątek (2009), and Józef Bohatkiewicz (1987).

However, there is still a lack of a collective portrait of Szczecin's teachers. This text primarily relies on archival materials from the State Archive in Szczecin, the Pomeranian Library, and the archive of the First High School. The reminiscences of the school's teachers hold significant value in this latter source.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Based on the preserved archival materials, it is not possible to create a complete collective portrait of teachers working in Szczecin in the early years after World War II. Therefore, a representative method was chosen, focusing on the earliest established secondary school in Szczecin – the Maria Skłodowska-Curie First High School. It is still the longest-standing upper secondary school in Szczecin and has been treated as an elite school for girls from the beginning, with efforts made to ensure its full staffing.

For the research, archival resources, written and recorded memoirs, as well as direct testimonies, were utilized. Based on these, a database was created. The collected data underwent statistical analysis. The research period was defined as the years 1945-1951.

The initial cut-off point is marked by the arrival of the first settlers, shortly followed by the establishment of the school. The final one is determined by the significant ideological change that occurred in Poland, marking the end of the period of spontaneous processes maintaining universal value for the analysis of similar phenomena in other regions of Europe.

#### 4. Results

Szczecin was occupied by the Red Army on April 26, 1945. Just two days later, the first president, Piotr Zaremba, appeared in the city. However, due to the lack of inter-Allied agreements, the Polish authorities had to leave the city, and it was only finally occupied by them on July 5. It was then that the mass settlement action could begin.

By August 1945, there were already 16,417 Poles living there, and further influx continued. Some families with children arrived, necessitating the establishment of schools. In the first school year, 6 primary schools and only one general high school for youth were established.

The task of creating the school was entrusted to Janina Szczerska, who arrived in Szczecin on May 11. She was a former soldier of the conspiracy, a participant in the Warsaw Uprising, and then a prisoner of the Ravensbrück concentration camp, and also a pre-war teacher (Lew-Machniak, 2017; Wysokińska-Łukasik, 2000; Machałek, 2009; Głowacka, Maciejowska, 2004).

After assembling the first teaching team and finding a suitable building, the inauguration of the first school year took place on Sunday, September 2, 1945. Initially, 30 students enrolled in the school, and the teaching staff consisted of 8 teachers. This number quickly changed. By the end of the school year, the number of students had increased to 723, and the number of teachers had grown to 18 full-time and 8 part-time.

While the overall number of students and teachers did not undergo significant changes in subsequent years (the number of students ranged from 448 to 946, and the number of teachers from 20 to 29), there was a significant turnover among the teaching staff.

**Table 1.** *The fluctuation in the number of students and teachers at the First High School in Szczecin between 1945 and 1951*

School year	Number of students	Number of teachers
1945/1946	723	18
1946/1947	506	20
1947/1948	448	29
1948/1949	853	22
1949/1950	946	24
1950/1951	679	22

*Source:* APS, KOSS, 164; APS, ILO, 19; APS, ILO, 20; APS, ILO, 21.

The significant turnover of teaching staff (on average, over 40% of the staff changed annually) stemmed from several factors. Firstly, it was heavily influenced by the very difficult material situation of the residents of Szczecin, supply difficulties, and

even famine in the early post-war months. The real wages of teachers in the initial period only covered 25-40% of the average family's maintenance costs (Turek-Kwiatkowska, 1977).

Additional factors included the uncertainty of the city's national affiliation due to the lack of international regulations for the Polish-German border and the low level of security in the city. In the first year, this was due to the plundering activities of the Red Army soldiers, and in the following years, it was due to local criminals.

Additionally, the natural population displacements during the migration period led people to move to other cities and regions in search of family members dispersed by the war. Some teachers transferred to other educational institutions established in Szczecin. Only three teachers (Janina Szczerska, Wiktoria Grodki, and Józefa Daneyko) worked at the school throughout the entire analyzed period.

**Table 2.** *Employment and dismissal of teachers at the First High School in Szczecin between 1946-1951*

School year	Employment	Dismissal	Percentage of staff changes
1946/1947	12	18	75
1947/1948	11	2	22
1948/1949	8	14	50
1949/1950	9	8	35
1950/1951	7	9	36

**Source:** APS, ILO, 19; APS, ILO, 20; APS, ILO, 198; APS, TPS, 4.

The issue of staff turnover primarily affected subjects that occupied the most space in the curriculum: Polish language and foreign languages, mathematics, history, religion, and philosophy. Specialists in these fields typically worked from 26 to 35, or even 40 hours per week, while the average workload was around 21 hours (APS, First High School, 19).

The teaching profession in the 20th century exhibited a high degree of feminization across Europe. However, immediately after the war, the situation was different. In the first year, men clearly outnumbered women, despite the overwhelming majority of girls among the students. This situation reflected the general characteristics of the settlement process in the border city in the early months after World War II.

Over time, women began to dominate the teaching staff at the First High School, and this trend deepened in subsequent years. This fact only partially explains the change in the societal structure. In September 1945, men constituted about 66% of all residents, while by 1950, this number had decreased to 49% (Kaczkowski, 1963; Bialecki, 1998). A major contributing factor was the low level of salaries for teachers and the establishment of new branches of the economy that employed men, offering them higher incomes.

**Table 3.** *The percentage of men and women in the teaching staff of the First High School in Szczecin between 1945 and 1951*

School year	Men	Women
1945-1946	61%	39%
1946-1947	45%	55%
1947-1948	41%	59%
1948-1949	32%	68%
1949-1950	33%	67%
1950-1951	23%	77%

**Source:** *APS, I LO, 19; APS, I LO, 20; APS, I LO, 198; APS, TPS, 4.*

## 5. Discussion

The teaching staff of the First High School emerges as the most extensively studied group in secondary education in Szczecin during the early post-World War II years. This can be attributed not only to its status as the earliest established institution but also to its elitist nature. From the outset, the city authorities aimed to have such a prestigious school in the city center.

Consequently, it benefited from the preserved local infrastructure and educational resources, with the most well-prepared teachers working there. Furthermore, throughout the entire post-war period, it was the only school led by the same principal, who was deeply involved in both the school's affairs and the city's life.

The privileged position of the First High School is evidenced by the fact that despite severe staffing shortages and significant teacher turnover, it maintained the most stable team of educators. In its second year of operation, the majority, 60%, were full-time teachers. In comparison, at the Second High School, this figure was 38%, with a regional average of 44% (APS, KOSS, 164, APS, KOSS, 27).

Therefore, the teaching staff of the First High School presents an attractive field of research for comparisons not only with the entire territories incorporated into Poland after 1945 but also with Poland as a whole and other areas undergoing territorial and demographic changes.

## 6. Conclusion

The profile of the teaching staff at the First High School in Szczecin largely reflected the cross-section of the city's population in the early years after World War II. Like the majority of residents in Szczecin, most teachers hailed from the central provinces of Poland.

The second-largest group in both cases comprised individuals who migrated from the eastern borderlands of the Second Polish Republic (APS, TPS, 3). Additionally, the biographies of the teaching staff mirrored the experiences of Poles before and

during World War II. Among them were survivors of concentration camps, educators in underground resistance schools, participants in the Warsaw Uprising, and soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the West.

Similarly to the city's inhabitants, the school staff were predominantly young individuals, initially mainly men, with women gaining increasing prominence over time. Despite qualifications initially falling below the required level, the teaching staff still comprised a higher-than-average number of well-educated individuals in the region.

Recognized by the authorities as a key institution, it enjoyed considerable support, enabling it to provide education at a level comparable to other regions of the country. Over the subsequent years, employees of the "First High School" often formed the nucleus of teaching teams for subsequent high schools established in the city. To some extent, the school has maintained this position to the present day.

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