

# Rebuilding the Unknown

**Forced Resettlement and Urban  
Identity Formation in Szczecin  
between 1945-1980**

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## ***acknowledgments***

I've wanted to write this paper for quite a long time. It connects the stories my grandparents shared about Szczecin and how their experiences during resettlement and border changes may have influenced the city's architecture. As an architecture student, I started thinking about how these stories shaped the buildings I grew up with. That's what led me to this research. In many ways, this paper is a love letter to the city that helped shape who I am - Szczecin.

I'm incredibly grateful to Serah Calitz. Her guidance and support have been key to this work. She listened to my ideas with excitement and curiosity, and pushed me to aim high without losing sight of our well-being. Her encouragement made this journey not just possible, but truly enjoyable.

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# Rebuilding the Unknown

## Forced Resettlement and Urban Identity Formation in Szczecin between 1945-1980

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### *abstract*

This paper explores the forced resettlement and urban identity formation in the city of Szczecin. The city underwent significant political and architectural transformation after the events of World War II. By looking at forced displacement, this paper will examine the urban transformation that happened in the city post-1945. It will look at how the city's new inhabitants, uprooted from eastern Polish territories, navigated a landscape filled with remnants of the German past.

Szczecin, once a thriving German port city, was rebranded as part of "Recovered Territories" and was given to Poland in the aftermath of the Second World War. Its new citizens were tasked with creating homes and identities in an unfamiliar environment. By focusing on personal narratives and spatial transformation of the city, I will investigate how these settlers adapted in the city. The paper will analyse the symbolic efforts to erase German heritage and how that played a role in constructing a new Polish identity. This study sheds light on the complexities of belonging in post-war urban spaces and the role of architecture and urban design in the formation of collective identity. From looking at the transformation of the historical centre between 1945 and the 1950s and the construction of communist-era housing estates, this paper will analyse how those spaces were shaped by factors of forced resettlement. Through archival research, urban analysis, and oral histories, I will aim to offer insights into the lasting effects of forced resettlement on the cultural and architectural identity of post-war Szczecin.

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## 1. Introduction

Szczecin is a city of shifting identities, a place where history and memory are layered in complex ways. Growing up there, I often heard stories from my grandparents - accounts of their lives and the lives of their parents in the region. They spoke of waking up in a place that felt foreign, a city that had little resemblance to the Poland they knew. This was not by choice, but the result of post-World War II border changes, when entire populations were displaced and resettled as national lines were redrawn.

What fascinated me most about their stories wasn't just their personal dimension, but the emotional weight they carried - the deep sense of dislocation and the quiet struggle to find belonging in an unfamiliar land. Though I have always thought of myself as Polish, as a "Szczecinian," it struck me that just a few generations earlier, my family had to learn how to feel at home in a city that had not been built for them. The streets, buildings, and even street names echoed a different national history. My great-grandparents and grandparents arrived in a city shaped by German heritage, yet were expected to make it their own. In doing so, they had to reconstruct not just their surroundings but also their sense of identity, reshaping both the emotional and physical landscape of what was to become their new home.

Scholars have extensively analysed the demographic shifts resulting from border changes and mass resettlements following World War II (Kosinski, 1963; Kledzik & Nowak, 2020). These studies have provided valuable insights into the scale and scope of these population movements. However, the cultural and identity transformations that followed, have received comparatively less scholarly attention (Rogalska, 2021). Recent studies have begun to address this gap by exploring themes of identity and belonging in what were perceived as “foreign lands” (Leshem, 2017; Navaro, 2012). Researchers such as Gawronska (2024) and Zmuda (2013) have used personal testimonies and postwar literature to analyse and shed light on narratives of displacement and/or adaptation.

Another significant contribution has been made by Karolina Cwiek-Rogalska, who examines how inhabitants of the “Recovered Territories” engaged in specific cultural practices. In her works, she showcases how Polish citizens would “claim” new lands by changing local signage or repurposing buildings that used to belong to Germans (2021,2022). Additionally, Bedynski (2022) discusses processes of transforming “lands without landscape” into meaningful spaces of belonging. He emphasizes adaptation and incorporation of German material culture into Polish households.

Despite these valuable contributions, a significant gap remains regarding the active formation of cultural identity in the recovered regions and how this process is reflected in the urban fabric and spatial practices of the cities themselves. Exploring these aspects is crucial for understanding the complex interplay between demographic changes, cultural adaptation, and urban development in postwar Poland.

This study will focus on areas of Szczecin and examine how fear, uncertainty, and a sense of impermanence influenced the identity of its post-war inhabitants. The experience of forced resettlement created a population that often felt temporary in their new home, unsure whether their presence in the city was permanent. This feeling took on various forms, from the neglect of German-built tenement houses to the construction of new socialist housing estates, such as the Kaliny neighbourhood, which offered a symbolic break from the past. By looking at both, how settlers lived and how the city evolved, I seek to uncover the relationship between forced displacement and physical space.

Through a combination of archival research, urban analysis, and oral histories, this paper will explore how post-war settlers adapted - or failed to adapt - to their new environment. It will examine the phenomenon of “exorcising the ghosts” (Cwiek-Rogalska, 2021), in which the new inhabitants altered or erased traces of German heritage as a means of claiming ownership over the city. Additionally, it will consider how the construction of new socialist-era housing estates (Kaliny) contributed to the formation of a collective identity that was rooted in modernity rather than history. Ultimately, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how forced displacement and urban transformation influenced the development of post-war Szczecin’s social and architectural identity.

## 2. Post-War Poland: Reconstruction and Territorial Shift

World War II left deep physical and political scars on Poland. It devastated its cities and displaced millions of citizens across the country and Eastern Europe. The destruction was particularly severe in urban centres, such as Warsaw. Approximately 85% of the city was destroyed in the 1944 Uprising and consequent German retaliation. After the war, the newly formed government - the Polish People's Republic (PRL) - concentrated its efforts on rebuilding the capital city. It was an act showing the resilience of the Polish community and its government (Stanley, 2018). This reconstruction was driven by a nationwide campaign with a slogan, "The Whole Nation rebuilds Its Capital" (Figures 1-3).



FIGURE 1. Hilscher, H. (1956). *Whole Nation Rebuilds its Capital*. Szczecin's National Archives.



FIGURE 2. Lipinski, E. (1956). *Whole Nation Rebuilds its Capital*. Szczecin's National Archives.

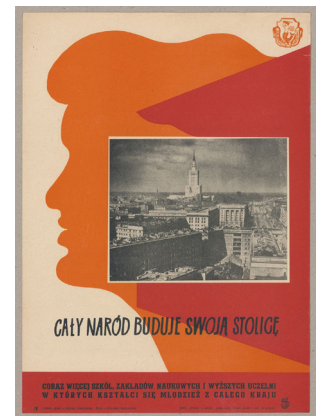


FIGURE 3. Cieslewicz, R. (n.d.). *Whole Nation Rebuilds its Capital*. Szczecin's National Archives.

While the PRL government focused on reconstructing what was left of Warsaw, another challenge arose – a mass displacement and resettlement of millions of Polish citizens. The geopolitical landscape of Central and Eastern Europe has been completely reshaped after World War II, and the Polish borders have shifted. This was a direct result of the Potsdam Conference in 1945. Poland lost its eastern territories – Kresy – to the Soviet Union. In return, the country acquired German regions such as Western Pomerania, Warmia, Masuria, Silesia, and the Lubusz Land (Kledzik et al., 2020) (Figure 4).

To further legitimize those lands, the new Polish government introduced the term “Recovered Territories”. It was used officially from the 27th of November 1945 till the 11th of November 1949. The term implied that these lands had always been a part of Poland’s historical and cultural heritage and were now rightfully reclaimed (Praczyk, 2018). However, this narrative was nothing but a propaganda tool. In reality, those lands have been a part of Germany for centuries, with little historical or cultural connection to Poland beyond medieval times.

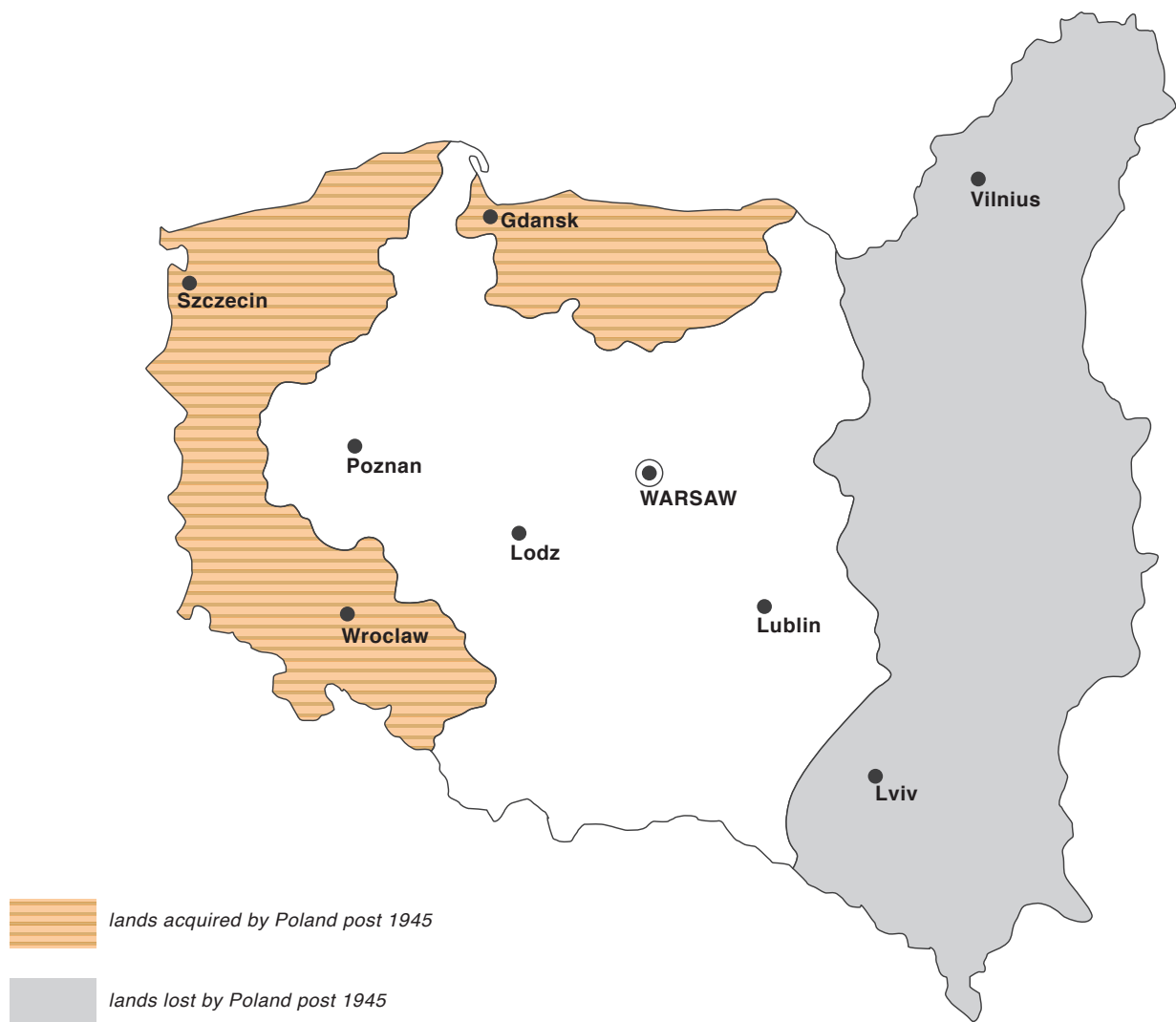


FIGURE 4. Baczkowski, P. (2025). *Recovered and Lost Territories post World War II*. adapted from original illustration by Sobczak, M. retrieved from <https://www.polityka.pl/pomocnikhistoryczny/1674782,1,jak-odbywalo-sie-przesiedlenie-ludnosci-polskiej.read>.

The “Recovered Territories” narrative served as a state-sponsored tool to justify Poland’s westward expansion and ease the resettlement of displaced Polish citizens. By using posters, such as those in figures 5 and 6, and speeches, the PRL government promoted the idea that those territories were “always Polish”. The propaganda aimed at making Polish citizens believe that these lands were merely restored to their original owner and status (McNamara, 2024).

This, however, ignored the diverse and complicated histories of the regions. The lands were multiethnic with a history of them belonging to Prussians, Swedish, and Germans throughout time, rather than as the state suggested – Polish. As a nation-rebuilding effort, the government tried to erase their German heritage and replace it with Polish. Oftentimes, this was artificially constructed. German street names, landmarks, or cultural symbols were being actively replaced or repurposed to fit the new Polish narrative.

Archival materials from this period reveal propaganda posters portraying Polish settlers as reclaiming “lost lands,” despite the reality that most of these new inhabitants had never lived there before.



FIGURE 5. Bowbelski, A. (1946). *Democratic Block is the Strongest Border Post* [Poster reinforcing western lands belonging to Poland]. National Museum of Independence in Warsaw.



FIGURE 6. Unknown, (1946). *Polish Sea, Ours Again* [Poster reinforcing western lands belonging to Poland]. National Museum of Independence in Warsaw.

Poland's "expansion" towards the west resulted in a significant demographic shift. Polish citizens – many displaced from former eastern territories, now under Soviet control – moved and settled in the "Recovered Territories". In contrast, German communities that had long lived in these lands were forced to leave. This transition was chaotic and took decades to complete. Forced migration created an environment that was filled with trauma and uncertainty for both Polish settlers and Germans that had to leave. While the majority of the German population moved due to fear of the advancing Soviet army, some remained, particularly in areas near the German border, as Zmuda (2013) highlights in his collection of firsthand accounts. For ordinary people, the process was not marked by violence. In many cases, Polish settlers, facing their challenges of displacement, met the Germans with empathy, recognizing the shared hardships both communities experienced during this turbulent period. This mutual understanding helped to soften the emotional strain of the transition.

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*" The Russians weren't here anymore when we arrived. Yet the owner, Lady von Hanstein, lived [in the manor]. Her older daughter's name was Marie, it was the one who wore glasses, and the other one's [name was] Anne, she had a baby, eight or seven-month-old. They were very nice and kind, all of them (...) And she [Lady von Hanstein] left without any packages, in clogs. She wasn't allowed to take her belongings with her."*

*( from Zdzislaw Iwanek letter, recollected in "Displaced Youth" By Zmuda(2013))*

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While Warsaw came to represent Poland's revival, the Recovered Territories remained places of uncertainty and change. The forced relocation of millions, along with the PRL's official historical narrative, led to a complicated and often disputed sense of identity in these regions - one that would influence their development for many years.

### 3. Szczecin: A City Caught in the Shift

Szczecin, once known as Stettin under German rule, was one of the largest cities affected by the shift in borders after 1945. Before the war, it was a major German port along the Oder River (Bommelburg, 2012). After the Potsdam Conference, the city was given to Poland, and many Germans were forced to leave. Polish citizens from the east were brought in to resettle.

The transition was far from easy. Szczecin lay in ruins, with much of the city destroyed during the war (Figure 7). The first Polish settlers arrived in a city still marked by its German past. German-language signs, buildings, and cultural symbols were everywhere, making the new Polish inhabitants feel like strangers in their city (Lubocka-Hoffmann, 2004).



FIGURE 7. Unknown. (1945). [Photograph of Szczecin in ruins]. Owned by B. Tomaszewski. Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=lastup&cat=81&pid=26584#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=lastup&cat=81&pid=26584#top_display_media)

To make matters worse, Soviet troops were stationed in the area, controlling both Polish administration and the remaining German population<sup>1</sup>. The situation was tense, and many settlers wondered if they would ever truly belong in Szczecin.

## 4. Urban Fabric and Past Identity

To understand and further analyse Szczecin and its post-war transformation, it is essential to examine the city's landscape and urban history before 1945. Stettin was one of the largest port cities in Germany. Being situated on the Oder River, just 65 kilometres from the Baltic Sea, it served as a hub for shipbuilding, industrial production, and international trade. Its location made it a key centre of commerce and the marine industry, which contributed significantly to Germany's economy (Cichocka, 2022). It is worth mentioning that while the city thrived as an industrial hub along the Oder River, it was also a city of elegant districts, rich architectural history, and green spaces.

By the 19th century, the city expanded beyond its original medieval plan. A plan from 1920 showcases its unique star-shaped design of the city centre (Figure 8). The layout is visible to this day, which is what earned the city its nickname - the Paris of the North. This star-shaped composition not only defined the city's structure but also influenced its growth.

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1 As mentioned earlier in chapter 2, a portion of the German population remained in Szczecin for several years following the territorial transition. This presence persisted during the uncertainty of the postwar period, even as the city's demographic and cultural identity was being reshaped.



FIGURE 8. Unknown, (1920). [Plan of Stettin]. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=1215&pid=11612#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=1215&pid=11612#top_display_media)

The central layout was surrounded by grand tenement houses that were built during the late 19th century and early 20th century. These buildings, usually four to five storeys high, formed the identity of the city's residential areas. Designed in an eclectic style, they took inspiration from and combined elements of Neo-Classical and Art Nouveau styles (Fiuk, 2017). The facades of these buildings were often adorned with intricate decorations, reflecting the wealth of the city at the time (Figures 9 and 10).



FIGURE 9. Unknown. (1907). [Turner Strasse, currently Jagiellońska Street]. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=748&pid=32369#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=748&pid=32369#top_display_media)



FIGURE 10. Unknown. (1907). [Beringer Strasse, currently Heroes of Warsaw Ghetto Street]. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=1288&pid=26055#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=1288&pid=26055#top_display_media)

Szczecin's heart was its old town, a place with history dating back to medieval times. Landmarks such as Pomeranian Duke's Castle, historic churches, and administrative buildings gave the city its character and reinforced its role as a regional power (Fiuk, 2023). The mix of industry, rich culture, and active social life created a diverse urban fabric, where different social classes and professions coexisted within the city's landscape.

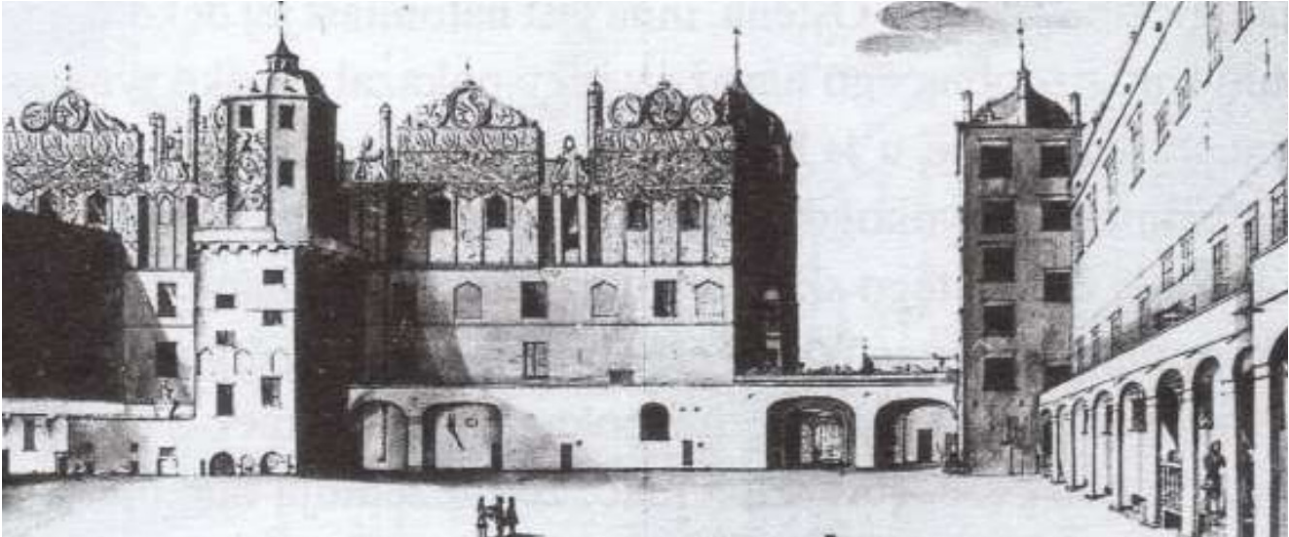


FIGURE 11. Zeuner, J. (1674). [Drawing of Pomeranian Dukes Castle, found at Skokloster Castle near Stockholm in 1972].

Szczecin's pre-war population was largely German<sup>2</sup>, and life in the city was dynamic. Theatres, museums, and universities served a thriving community. The dense residential district, made up of the previously mentioned tenement houses, fostered a sense of neighbourhood identity. These same densely built areas would become both a physical and a symbolic battlefield during World War II.

As the war was coming to an end and the tides turned against Germany, Szczecin was subjected to heavy bombing campaigns that destroyed large parts of the city's infrastructure and residential areas (Krasnicki, 2004). In early 1945, the Red Army took over and occupied the city. During this chaotic period, much of the German population fled or was expelled. The city's future hung in the balance, with neither Polish, Soviet, nor German authorities having formal control.

Reports from that time describe a city that was in ruins. Large portions of the historic urban fabric were either completely destroyed or damaged (Lubocka-Hoffman, 2004). Many tenement houses had been levelled by the bombing raids, with entire districts gone.

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<sup>2</sup> As a major port city engaged in significant international trade, the population of Szczecin was not exclusively German. It also included Jewish and some Polish inhabitants.

Additionally, other infrastructure, such as bridges, roads, and railway lines, was also heavily damaged, which would further complicate any efforts to rebuild the city.

Following months of uncertainty and negotiations by the Allied powers, Szczecin, belonging to Poland, was formalised in July 1945 (Gierlasinski, 2011). The Polish government began a resettlement program that aimed to populate the city and “Recovered Territories” with Polish citizens.

An actor who played a role in shaping the identity of Szczecin after it became Polish was the first appointed president of the city, Piotr Zaremba. With prior education as a landscape designer and urban planner, his major focus was on reconstructing the city’s infrastructure to help the city regain its cultural identity. Zaremba and his administration prioritized the restoration of severely damaged, key historical landmarks, such as the Pomeranian Duke’s castle. The strategy reflected a broader national effort to “Polonize” the newly acquired territories, framing the recovery of cities like Szczecin as part of Poland’s historical destiny.



FIGURE 12. Unknown. (1948). [Photograph of Pomeranian Dukes Castle in ruins after World War II]. Owned by B. Tomaszewski. Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=846&pid=26187#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=846&pid=26187#top_display_media)

## 5. Exorcising the Streets

During the restoration efforts, many parts of the city, especially residential areas, were neglected. Tenement houses, though still standing, carried visible traces of the city's German past. The new residents, many of whom had been displaced from the east, faced not only the trauma of losing their homes but also the unsettling presence of Soviet troops. Their behaviour often created a sense of fear and insecurity (Lysakowska-Trzoss, 2020).

This hostile atmosphere, shaped by both the remnants of the past and the actions of the Soviet troops, pushed many people toward the city centre. Oral histories from that time describe how new inhabitants sought comfort in forming close-knit communities in the urban core (Kersten, 2011). Living near others provided a sense of security in an unfamiliar environment. In a city still adjusting to its new identity, these shared spaces became essential for survival, both physically and emotionally. The need for safety and belonging shaped how people navigated their new reality, turning the city centre into more than just a place to live - it became a refuge from the unease that surrounded them.

The tenement houses and urban fabric of present-day Szczecin offer a powerful example of what Karolina Cwiek-Rogalska calls "exorcising the ghosts" (2022). This phrase captures how post-war Polish settlers coped with the lingering presence of the city's German past. Their new surroundings - buildings, signage, street names - were not their own, yet they had to find ways to live among them. When we compare a 1900 map of Stettin by H. Peters (Figure 14) to the current layout of Szczecin (Figure 13), the transformation becomes clear. Street names have changed. The city has been rewritten - layer by layer.

One of the most striking examples is Kaiser-Wilhelm-Strasse. This street, marked in blue on the map, was a key part of the city's structure. According to Afeltowicz (2014), it was among the first areas to be repopulated due to its central location and residential appeal. Once Szczecin became Polish, renaming this street was a priority. Originally named after Emperor Wilhelm I Hohenzollern, it was changed to the Avenue of National Identity (Kościńska, 2015)<sup>3</sup>.

This was one of the first major steps in erasing German influence. Many other streets followed a similar pattern, replacing German names with ones tied to Polish history. A good example is Deutsche Strasse, which was split into Greater Poland Street and Piasts' Avenue<sup>4</sup>.

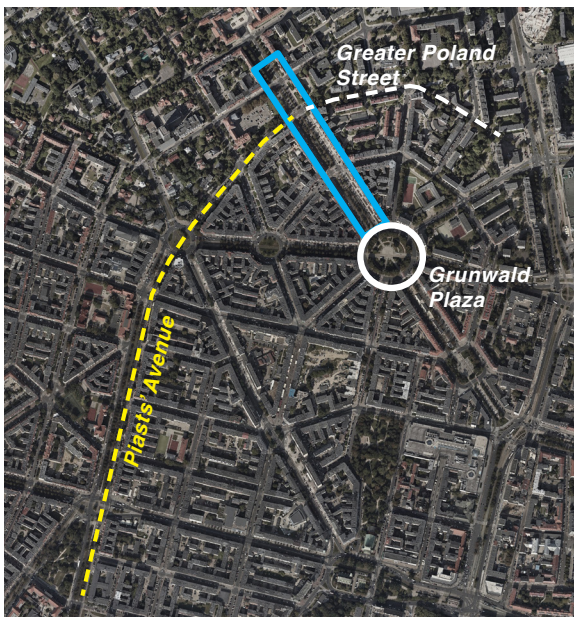


FIGURE 13. Google Earth. (2024). Aerial view of Szczecin, Poland [Satellite image]. Google. <https://earth.google.com/>

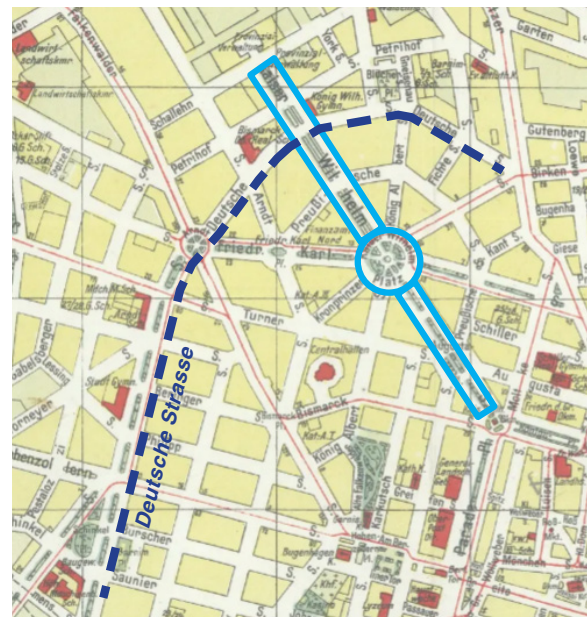


FIGURE 14. Peters, H. (1900). [Plan of 1900 Stettin]. Retrieved from <https://www.oldmapsonline.org/en/Sto%C5%82czyn?gid=523d2059-36cc-53d4-b3d6-c5a67e2000b0#position=12.3311/53.4426/14.5394&year=1900>

3 In recent years the street was renamed by virtue of Resolution of the Szczecin City Council No. X/284/07 of 11 June 2007 to the John Paul II Avenue, after the first Polish Pope.

4 Piasts' Avenue takes its name from the first royal dynasty of Poland that ruled Poland between 960 to 1370.

## 6. Tenement Houses: Between Neglect and Uncertainty

While renaming streets and removing German symbols was a conscious effort to “exorcise the ghosts” of the past, the physical structures of Szczecin - especially its tenement houses - told a different story. These grand, ornate buildings, once symbols of a thriving German city, were largely ignored in post-war reconstruction efforts. The Polish authorities prioritized restoring monumental landmarks like the Pomeranian Duke’s Castle (chapter 4), institutions that could help reinforce a new Polish identity. In contrast, the everyday homes of Szczecin’s new inhabitants were often left in a state of neglect.

This was not just a matter of resources - it was about psychology. The people who arrived in Szczecin were often themselves displaced, coming from former Polish territories in the East. They arrived with little certainty about their own future, let alone the city’s. Would they stay? Would the Soviets change the borders again? Would the Germans return? This sense of impermanence shaped their relationship with the spaces they now inhabited. Many settlers saw their homes as temporary shelters rather than places to invest in or restore.

Archival photographs of National Unity Avenue (formerly Kaiser Wilhelm Strasse) illustrate this transformation vividly. Before 1945, the tenement houses lining the street were decorated with elaborate facades, rich in detail - ornate balconies, intricate cornices, and decorative window frames (Figures 15 and 16). They were built to last, designed to showcase wealth and stability. The war changed all that. Post-war images show these same buildings stripped of their ornamentation, reduced to plain, utilitarian structures.



FIGURE 15. Unknown. (1905). [Photograph of Kaiser-Wilhelm-Strasse]. Owned by P. Ladyca. Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=648&pid=23152#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=648&pid=23152#top_display_media)



FIGURE 16. Unknown. (nd.). [Photograph of Kaiser-Wilhelm-Strasse]. Owned by P. Ladyca. Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=648&pid=23152#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=648&pid=23152#top_display_media)

A particularly striking example is house No. 34. In a 1946 photograph, the damage from wartime destruction is visible (Figure 17). The façade is missing sections, windows are shattered, and destroyed ornamental decorations expose the brickwork. A later image from 1950 shows that reconstruction had taken place, but only out of necessity. The building was repaired, but the architectural details were never restored (Figure 18).



FIGURE 17. Unknown. (1946). [Photograph of National Unity tenement house no. 34 after World War II]. Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=1418&pid=13615#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=1418&pid=13615#top_display_media)



FIGURE 18. Unknown. (1950). [Photograph of National Unity tenement house no. 34 reconstruction after World War II]. Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=1418&pid=13616#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=1418&pid=13616#top_display_media)

Another compelling example of neglect, likely tied to this feeling of impermanence, is an archival image of new Polish citizens buying Christmas trees in 1950 (Figure 19). At first glance, it's a simple, familiar scene - people preparing for the holiday season. But the background tells a different story. The street is still scattered with post-war rubble, and the tenement houses behind it look bare and worn. Their facades, once full of detail, are now stripped down, left unfinished. The contrast is striking.



FIGURE 19. Weczer, A. (1950). [Photograph of Polish citizens buying Christmas tree in the streets of Szczecin]. Szczecin's National Archives

These people are trying to create a sense of normalcy, celebrating a tradition, yet they are surrounded by reminders of war and uncertainty. Did they see these buildings as home? Or just as a place to stay for now? The hesitation to restore these spaces wasn't just about money - it was about belonging. Many settlers still felt like outsiders in a city that had once belonged to someone else.

Why was this happening? Some might argue that it was simply a matter of economic hardship - rebuilding a war-torn city required pragmatism. But the lack of restoration also reflected a deeper hesitation, an emotional distance between the settlers and their new homes. Oral histories from post-war residents suggest that many felt like they were living in someone else's city, occupying buildings that still held the ghosts of their former German owners (Piskorski, 2017).

This uncertainty seeped into everyday life. People didn't just feel out of place - they felt out of sync with themselves. The city was unfamiliar, the buildings weren't theirs, and the streets spoke a language they didn't recognize. Many settlers didn't know who they were anymore. They had left something behind, but hadn't yet found something new to hold onto. It wasn't just the walls and rooftops that felt temporary - it was the feeling of self, of belonging. Without roots in the space around them, it was hard to feel settled inside. There was an unspoken understanding: these buildings were not truly "theirs".

## **7. Rediscovering Modernism and Shaping New Identity**

A significant shift took place in Polish architecture during the 1950s and early 1960s. This period, often called the "Rediscovery of Modernism," marked a kind of architectural renaissance. Influenced by Soviet ideals and communist ideology, modernism re-emerged in Poland, with a focus on function, simplicity, and mass housing. In Szczecin, the clean lines and concrete forms of this new architecture offered more than just shelter, they symbolized a break from the past. Though today many of these structures are labelled "unwanted heritage" (Ciarkowski, 2019), at the time, they felt like a fresh start. For those still haunted by the city's German past, modernism became a way to move forward - to build something that was finally, undeniably, theirs.

An example of this transformation is seen in the development of National Unity Avenue (Figure 20). In the early 1960s, two large concrete blocks, designed by Tadeusz Ostrowski, were constructed on the site of what had once been elegant tenement houses (Bal, 2017). These new buildings were a striking contrast to what stood there before the war. This architectural change was not only visual - it reflected a deeper shift in how the city's new identity was being shaped, moving away from its pre-war heritage and toward a collective, modernist vision rooted in post-war realities.



FIGURE 20. Unknown. (1970). [Photograph of Modernist buildings introduced along, what was previously known as Kaiser-Wilhelm-Strasse, now Grunwald Plaza] . Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=888&pid=8018#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=888&pid=8018#top_display_media)

## 8. Kaliny Neighbourhood: Building the Future

The wave of modernist buildings had been filling in the gaps left by levelled tenement houses throughout the 1950s and 1960s. This shift reshaped Szczecin's urban fabric. These buildings even got an amusing nickname that is still being used by Szczecinians - "plomby" (dental fillers). Even though the central city's transformation was a major shift, another, even more significant transformation was taking place beyond Szczecin's historic core.



FIGURE 21. Unknown. (n.d.). [Photograph circa 1960s of a "dental filler" on Krzywoustego Street] . Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [https://sedina.home.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=884&pid=7993#top\\_display\\_media](https://sedina.home.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=884&pid=7993#top_display_media)

The city's population was steadily growing and acclimating. However, there was a major population boom between 1955-1959. While many Poles successfully relocated to the "Recovered Territories", some were forced to stay behind in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR) (Winnicki, 2012)<sup>5</sup>. The Polish government worked with the BSSR and the USSR government on a treaty to secure the safe return of those inhabitants. This process came to be known as second repatriation or repatriation-evacuation (Ruchniewicz, 2000).

As more people arrived in Szczecin, the need for housing became urgent. Restoration efforts in the historic city centre were slow and selective, focusing mainly on key landmarks rather than the vast tenement districts where many displaced residents had once lived. Instead of reintegrating the existing urban fabric, the government took a different approach - creating entirely new neighbourhoods based on modernist principles. I grew up in one of these neighbourhoods, Kaliny. Though surrounded by stories of displacement and hardship in the city centre, I also heard tales of community and joy in the so-called "communist-era housing." Kaliny was one of the most notable examples of this new vision for urban living.

Unlike the city centre, where reconstruction efforts blended different architectural approaches, Kaliny was built from scratch, following socialist ideals of modernist design. The planning for the neighbourhood had begun in the early 1950s when a design studio called Lenprojekt had been tasked with creating a new model for residential living. Inspired by the prefabrication and mass concrete techniques popularized by Le Corbusier, they designed apartment complexes ranging from five to twelve stories (Bal, 2017). These buildings, fabricated in Leningrad and shipped across Poland and other Soviet territories, earned the nickname "leningrads." They became the foundation of Kaliny.

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5 The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), founded in 1920, was one of the original republics of the Soviet Union. After World War II, Poland's eastern territories (Kresy) were annexed by the USSR, and many Poles were absorbed into the BSSR. Some were later repatriated to Poland, but many had to remain due to shifting borders, bureaucracy, or missing documents - part of what became known as the "second repatriation." (Winnicki, 2012)



FIGURE 22. Unknown. (1980). [Photograph of Kaliny neighbourhood] . Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=908&pid=29812#top\\_display\\_media](http://sedina.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=908&pid=29812#top_display_media)

As seen in the archival image above, the stark contrast between Kaliny and Szczecin's older architecture was striking. Even though the neighbourhood was located not too far from the historic centre, it represented a monumental shift in design. The goal of the neighbourhood was very simple. The government wanted and needed to provide standardized and mass-produced housing to accommodate as many citizens as they could. The rapid design of Leningrad and the neighbourhood also meant that it was not intended to last. Kaliny's lifespan was estimated to be approximately 30 years.

The temporary nature of communist era housing raises an important question. Was there an underlying feeling of impermanence reflected in the decision to design a rapid, fairly short-term housing estate?

The previously mentioned fears most likely affected the psychological state of new residents of Szczecin and created a feeling of uncertainty about the future. The construction of an estate that emphasized speed and functionality was not merely a reflection of modernist or communist ideologies - it was also an architectural response to a fear of impermanence. Modernism itself held a complex relationship with the idea of time. Rooted in a belief that architecture should reflect the present rather than imitate the past, modernist design embraced change and functionality over tradition. Influenced by figures like Le Corbusier and the principles of the International Style, modernist architecture prioritized rationality, mass production, and a break from ornamentation. Buildings were not necessarily made to last forever in a symbolic sense, but rather, they were made to serve a purpose, here and now.

In Kaliny, this translated into a housing estate that was designed with utility in mind, using industrial techniques to solve urgent housing needs. The temporariness of its materials and design mirrored the emotional state of many settlers, uncertain of how long they would stay, unsure if this new life was truly permanent. Modernism, in this case, did not promise eternity - it promised a fresh start. And perhaps that was what residents needed most.

Kaliny, though located on the outskirts of Szczecin's historic heart, played a vital role in transforming the city's social and emotional landscape. The older tenement districts carried the heavy burden of a foreign German past, making them feel disconnected from the Polish identity. In contrast, Kaliny symbolized a fresh chapter. It wasn't designed with the specific goal of creating a new start, but it ended up offering just that. People displaced by the war found in Kaliny a chance to rebuild their lives. The neighbourhood's modernist layout - with its green spaces, wide streets, and communal areas - brought a sense of order and calm that was missing in the chaotic city centre.



FIGURE 23. Unknown. (1979). [Photograph of a couple taking their dog out in the Kaliny neighbourhood] . Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [https://sedina.home.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=2702&pid=29094#top\\_display\\_media](https://sedina.home.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=2702&pid=29094#top_display_media)



FIGURE 24. Unknown. (1979). [Photograph of kids playing games durin local summer festival in the Kaliny neighbourhood] . Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [https://sedina.home.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=2702&pid=29104#top\\_display\\_media](https://sedina.home.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=2702&pid=29104#top_display_media)

Archival photos from the 1970s and 1980s show a community coming together after resettlement. One photo captures a happy couple, surrounded by greenery, with the modern Kaliny buildings in the background (Figure 23). It reflects the calm and stability these new surroundings provided. Another image shows children enjoying a local summer festival and winter sports, highlighting the freedom and sense of connection felt by the younger generation (Figures 24 and 25). These moments echo Zmuda's ideas in *Displaced Youth*, where young people, given a fresh start, were able to build strong bonds and feel safe in a city that was itself shifting its identity (2013).

Kaliny's design, though simple, encouraged people to interact and connect. It was more than just a place to live - it became a space for healing and rebuilding. After the trauma of war, it offered the residents stability and a sense of belonging in a city that had once been full of uncertainty.



FIGURE 25. Unknown. (1979). [Photograph of kids sledging during winter in the Kaliny neighbourhood] . Sedina.pl. Retrieved from [https://sedina.home.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=2702&pid=29094#top\\_display\\_media](https://sedina.home.pl/galeria/displayimage.php?album=2702&pid=29094#top_display_media)

## 9. Past, present and a certain future

The architectural and societal transformation that happened in Szczecin after World War II tells an interesting story. It is a story of displacement and searching for a new identity. The post-war struggle in the city was marked by a struggle of fighting ghosts of the past and meeting realities of the present. The grand tenement houses that symbolized German wealth and stability were being neglected by new inhabitants. These buildings, reconstructed without their original beauty of ornamentation or left in disrepair, reflected a sense of uncertainty and fear of impermanence. The post-war settlers, many of whom had been displaced from former Polish territories in the East, saw these structures as temporary shelters rather than homes. Did the possible psychological effects of displacement make it difficult for people to invest emotionally in the city's architectural heritage?

In contrast, the rediscovery of modernism in the 1950s and 1960s marked a significant shift in the city's development. The construction of concrete, utilitarian buildings marked an important shift that symbolised a break from the past. The boldness of these modernist designs, though often criticized as "unwanted heritage," provided a clean break from the intricate but troubled legacy of pre-war Szczecin. These structures were viewed by many as a fresh start, a new representation of the Polish identity emerging in the city. For a population still reeling from the trauma of war and displacement, the modernist buildings symbolized stability and progress, providing a sense of permanence in a world.

Impermanence, however, wasn't just visible in bricks and concrete. It shaped how people saw themselves and their place in the city. Without a true sense of stability - either in their homes or their future - many settlers struggled to feel like they belonged at all.

They were living between identities: no longer part of the places they had left behind, but not yet anchored to the new world around them. The buildings around them, whether crumbling tenements or hastily constructed housing blocks, mirrored that in-betweenness. The delay in creating a lasting, shared urban identity wasn't just due to politics or planning - it was rooted in this emotional and psychological uncertainty.

Despite this, Kaliny represented a new beginning for many. Unlike the tenement houses in the city centre that still lingered with the German past, Kaliny was a new space. Even though it was never meant to symbolise it, it became a centre of community building, where the past could have been forgotten and new paths forged. As the residents of Kaliny interacted with their surroundings, they were able to rebuild their lives and, in doing so, helped shape the future of Szczecin as a city that was no longer defined by the trauma of the past but by the hope for a new, collective future.

Ultimately, the architectural evolution of Szczecin between the post-war period and the early 1980s reflects a complex play of historical trauma, new political ideologies, and the search for new identities. The neglect of the city's pre-war landscape, the rise of modernist design, and the construction of brand new neighbourhoods all reveal the city's struggles. A struggle to reconcile the past with the present and to create a sense of permanence in a world marked by uncertainty. The story of Szczecin's urban fabric is not just about bricks and mortar. It is a story about a long journey of emotional struggles and of people rebuilding their lives and their sense of self in a city that was, for so long, caught between the ghosts of the past and the hopes for the future.

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