

Article

# Enclaves of Isolation and Neglect in Rural Areas. Evidence from North-Eastern Poland

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on the specificity of present enclave structures in rural areas that were created decades ago as a result of decisions to establish housing estates for employees, and which acquired negative features as a result of the liquidation of the monopolistic employer. An attempt has been made to answer if workers' housing complexes can turn into permanent enclaves of isolation and neglect after the liquidation of a monopolistic workplace, especially if they are located in rural areas? The aim of the paper is to picture the process of social exclusion emergence in the rural areas, which results from the still unresolved socio-economic problem of the existence of such enclaves of isolation and neglect in Polish rural areas in the 21st century. Despite almost 30 years passing, the areas with spatially and socially isolated settlements have very high unemployment rates, a low level of technical and social infrastructure and a widespread sense of injustice among the people who live there. The empirical basis for the analysis was four cases. The presented stories took place against the historical background of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship and the socio-economic background. Studies were conducted in the selected villages with a free-form interview and photographic documentation was prepared. In the result, a close picture of the enclaves was drawn. The examples presented in this article proved that workers' settlements, located around large economic entities distant from existing settlement networks can develop into enclaves of isolation and neglect.

**Keywords:** enclaves; rural areas; isolation

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## 1. Introduction

In social terms, enclave structures are regarded as an integral part of the transformation and globalism, and the phenomenon of people enclosing themselves in various social enclaves is one of the natural defensive mechanisms and ways of adapting to an uncertain and complex world [1]. Enclaves, like isolated islands, are often a place of a liberating escape from the hardships of the outer world for their inhabitants. However, they can also become areas of rejection or even stigmatisation. Living in an enclave may be a consequence of a more or less conscious choice, but it may also be the result of necessity [2]. Enclaves can be established at a grassroots initiative, i.e. by their inhabitants. In such cases, they are created in order to satisfy socially distinct needs. They are inhabited by artists and social activists (e.g., 'Christiania' in Copenhagen, 'Otwarty Jazdów' in Warsaw) or followers of radical religions or different lifestyles (e.g., ReGen Villages). There are also distinct enclaves, such as fenced housing estates inhabited by people with relatively higher incomes [3–5] and immigrants who live in homogeneous ethnic estates, e.g., in communes near Shanghai or Warsaw [6,7]. Immigrants enclaves were also observed in many other countries, i.e., the US [8–10] or England [11]. Within cities and villages, there are also enclaves created as a result of decisions of authorities and often in

a manner contrary to the wishes of their inhabitants, such as container community housing estates<sup>1</sup> (e.g., in Polish cities Żory and Białystok). Enclaves formed as a result of economic decisions are a special case. They include, for example, spatially isolated housing estates, inhabited by employees of active or liquidated enterprises which have monopolised the local labour market.

A characteristic feature of all enclaves is their spatial distinctiveness, both objective (separate position in the settlement system) and in the minds of their inhabitants and surroundings [12]. In addition, enclaves are also socially and economically distinctive. This distinctiveness may also strengthen the unfavourable and pathological phenomena. Spatially and socially isolated places become sites of many negative processes and phenomena, e.g., poverty, unemployment, violence, helplessness or psychoactive drug abuse. The common feature of such isolated housing estates is, inter alia, a high percentage of unemployment, a low level of education, a high intensity of excluded individuals, a low level of living and sanitary conditions, poor infrastructure, high indicators of deviant behaviours (e.g., alcohol abuse or violence), as well as lowered aspirations and motivation to work [8]. Another problem is the insufficient mobility of their inhabitants, which makes it difficult or even impossible to get out of the enclave [13].

The creation and existence of enclaves with socially and economically disadvantageous features are favoured by spatial mismatches. The relative location of the place of residence, i.e., its location in relation to the labour market and access to various services, plays a significant role in the quality of life of the inhabitants of particular places [14–18]. Spatial factors, including the location of one's place of residence, have an influence on professional mobility [19], the type and quality of work, and they develop susceptibility to abuse of psychoactive substances, such as alcohol [20], marijuana [21] and other substances [22].

The creation of enclaves is also fostered by the accomplishment of socially unbalanced economic objectives. Economic activities based on resources located far from the existing settlement network are accompanied by the creation of new specific housing estates—worker's camps. Examples of this phenomenon include extracting enclaves in Africa, e.g., in Katanga: "Since Katanga was isolated and sparsely populated, it adopted the migrant labour system developed by South African mining companies; contractors recruited workers from afar and drove them to Southern Katanga. This system, or mode of recruitment, was intended to provide a large and cheap workforce." [23] Other examples of African extraction enclaves are in Burkina Faso [24] and Kenya's soil extraction units [25]. Enclaves are also made up of economic immigrants who arrive in industrial areas. By settling in a new location, they form separate, small social circles, e.g., in China [26–28], the USA [29], Sweden [30] and Poland [7].

Enclaves created as a result of the location of business ventures acquire many particularly negative features upon the bankruptcy or termination of such ventures. If the population is not naturally dispersed, the workers' enclaves gradually turn into enclaves of isolation and neglect. Enclaves of neglect can be identified in indifferent places in Poland. The particular attention of scientists has been attracted by enclaves of poverty in Łódź [31], in the Lubuskie Voivodship [1], in the Śląskie Voivodship [32] and in areas where State Owned Farms (SOF, in Polish: Państwowe Gospodarstwa Rolne) existed in the past (1949–1993) [33]. In the case of former SOFs, the formation of enclaves is a by-product of the pursuit of economic objectives by the socialist state in the area of agricultural development. State farms, created by government and whose operation was in line with the concept of a state based on a socialist economy, were located where agricultural land with appropriate surface parameters and of appropriate rating classes was available. With insufficient mechanization, development of agriculture required significant labour input, so the emerging and growing State Owned Farms needed thousands of employees. Therefore, together with the state farms, company housing estates were established for farm workers coming from all over the country. These settlements

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<sup>1</sup> Housing estates to which residents of social buildings who are in arrears with payment of rent are transferred. The role of residential buildings is played by containers. These settlements arouse a lot of controversy and protests because they are identified with ghettoisation and degeneration of social life.

were typically located close to a large state-owned farm. The proximity of housing and farms was to ensure the flexibility of a working day<sup>2</sup>, and the distance from the existing settlement network of individual farms and transport infrastructure was compensated for by providing their own transport to their employees<sup>3</sup>. The transformation, which began in the 1990s, and the accompanying strong social and economic transformation processes, including the liquidation of state farms, completely changed the lives of the inhabitants of these housing estates, by offering them new opportunities and by creating the need to find a fulfilling way of life in new conditions and often redefining their position in the labour market. Former SOF employees were given the opportunity to purchase apartments at a price reduced by a discount or further lease of real estate. As a result, some of the former SOF housing estates evolved naturally—some were completely deserted, others were absorbed by expanding villages and towns. However, intensified emigration taking place in rural areas, both domestic and foreign, also revealed the remains of the previous economic model—settlements still inhabited by the former SOF workers, they formed enclaves of isolation and neglect that have been in existence for 30 years, chaotically scattered across the rural landscape.

In this paper an attempt has been made to answer the research question: Can workers' housing complexes turn into permanent enclaves of isolation and neglect after the liquidation of a monopolistic workplace, especially if they are located in the rural areas? This paper focuses on the specificity of enclaves created many years ago as a result of decisions to establish housing estates for SOF employees, and which acquired negative features as a result of the liquidation of the farm, which for forty years had been a monopolist on the local labour market. The aim of the paper is to draw attention to the still unresolved socio-economic problem of the existence of such enclaves of isolation and neglect in Polish rural areas in the 21st century. Despite almost 30 years passing, the areas with spatially and socially isolated settlements have very high unemployment rates, a low level of technical and social infrastructure (source: Statistics Poland) and a widespread sense of injustice among the people who live there (source: interview result). This issue is worth exploring also because of the high social costs of isolation, which has been hypothesized to contribute to elevated rates of mental disorders [34], as socially isolated people are more likely to experience depression [35].

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study presents four cases, assumed as representative because of their specificity. These cases are located in Poland, in the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, which is located in the north-eastern part of Poland (Figure 1).

The presented stories took place against the historical background of the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship and the socio-economic background of the following counties<sup>4</sup>: Braniewo, Lidzbark Warmiński and Bartoszyce, and two municipalities of the county of Olsztyn – Świątki and Dobre Miasto. Before the administrative reform, these municipalities were part of Lidzbark County and provided residential functions for the SOFs based in Lidzbark County (Figure 2).

The above mentioned counties were identified by the National Support Centre for Agriculture (NSCA) as particularly problematic areas. Several indicators were taken into account to create the socio-economic background: total migration balance per 1000 people, unemployment rate, working population per 1000 people, public roads with a hard surface per 100 km<sup>2</sup>, passenger cars registered per 1000 people. These indicators are presented against the background of Poland. The indicators are presented to show the situation of the population living in these regions in terms of the labour market and mobility. For the data on migration balance, the average was calculated for the last three for which

<sup>2</sup> Which was particularly important in the case of low-mechanical handling of farm animals, e.g., cow handling required several visits to the shed during the day. Between performing their duties, the cowshed personnel could return home (source: an account of a former employee of the SOF in the county of Lidzbark).

<sup>3</sup> Frequently carried out with so-called "osinobuses".

<sup>4</sup> Each voivodeship in Poland is divided into counties, which in turn are divided into municipalities.



by the NSCA and rented out to former SOF workers. Four villages were selected from the database, representing different forms of spatial management:

- The whole settlement comprises one multi-family house (Jankówko);
- There is an old, formerly German, manor house in the village, turned into flats for SOF workers (Komalwy);
- A typical housing settlement, established for the SOF (Kunik);
- An SOF housing settlement established in a former nobleman's manor house (Borki).

Studies were conducted in the selected villages with a free-form interview and photographic documentation was prepared. The free-form interview is a technique related to qualitative studies and it involves direct interrogation—i.e., no questionnaire with standardised questions—in the form of a personal conversation. It is conducted in order to establish the typology and phenomena which can be examined qualitatively. It is used in monographic studies of specific groups and issues and in exploratory studies [36]. Information from a direct study was obtained in 2019. Information on the living situation in the described villages was collected from three sides: from the residents, employees of municipal social welfare centres and a NSCA employee. The free form interviews were conducted during several hours of conversations. The interviews were attended by families living in residential properties rented to former SOF employees that agreed to take part in the study (16 people). The knowledge about the situation of the described people was expanded by additional interviews among employees of communal social welfare centres (seven people). In addition, a representative of the NSCA was interviewed, who coordinated the management of the properties left over from the former state farms and had personal contact with the tenants.

The location of the units examined in the study was presented on maps shared by the following portals: Spatial Information Infrastructure Geoportal and the Atlas of Warmia and Mazury Spatial Information System.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Historical Background

The Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship is situated in the so-called Recovered Territories, i.e., areas that were under the German rule before the World War II (so called Eastern Prussia). After 1945, a significant part of the agricultural land in this area was incorporated into the State Land Properties, and then the State Land Fund. As a result, in terms of the land ownership structure, this northern part of Poland was particularly suitable for creating large-area state-owned farms. In the former Olsztyn Voivodship, state farms were the largest in terms of area—the average farm area was 966 ha in 1969 and, in total, they occupied 32.8% of all agricultural land (396,894 ha). It should be stressed that the location of farms, their number and acreage were not a consequence of economic factors, but of the availability of state-owned land. As a result, the largest number of hectares intended for agricultural production were situated in voivodship with unfavourable natural conditions for agriculture (including those resulting from the climate and terrain), which brought about difficulties achieving an increase in the total production output in the SOFs and had an impact on the costs of such production. However, the national objectives had to be accomplished, which necessitated managing unused land [37].

The surplus of land in relation to the population in the Warmia and Mazury part of the Recovered Lands resulted to a large extent from the displacement of the German population. The seized estates were built up by manor complexes or single palaces and manor houses with auxiliary buildings [38]. Overtime, intensive settlement was carried out. Large and small SOFs were established, to which employees from all over Poland and the areas close to the border were brought. A growing number of employees needed housing infrastructure, which was difficult to supply due to material shortages. As a result, manual workers were directed to manor buildings, and low-quality so-called “houses” with 3, 4, 6, 8 and 10 flats were built. Manor houses and palaces were also often used as flats after

dividing them into flats for employees. For example, a former nobleman’s estate in Ciemna Wola, consisting of a manor house and eighthouses, was divided into 27 apartments, providing shelter for 117 people (SOF workers) [38]. As time passed, new housing estates were established at the farms, and one-storey residential blocks, together with garages and farm buildings, were built in the 1970s and 1980s (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** Example of typical buildings of the State Owned Farms (SOF) settlement—(a) a block of flats and (b) a farmhouse (so-called “shed”). Source: Photos taken by Author.

These settlements were typically located close to a state-owned large-scale farm. The proximity of the place of residence and the farm was to ensure flexibility of the working day, which was particularly important in the case of low-mechanised service of farm animals, e.g., cow service required several visits to the cowshed during the day. Between performing their duties, cowshed employees could return home (source: the relation of an interviewed former employee of the SOF in the Lidzbark county). The remoteness from the existing settlement network of individual farms and transport infrastructure was compensated for by providing own transport for their employees by means of buses, scornfully called “bonanza” (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Employee transport vehicle — osinobus. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe (National Digital Archive, [www.nac.gov.pl](http://www.nac.gov.pl)).

State Owned Farms in Poland were liquidated at the beginning of the 1990s. Employees lost their jobs overnight. During the restructuring of property after SOFs, assets serving social purposes were separated, including flats. These apartments could be purchased by tenants on preferential

terms. Alternatively, tenants could lease the occupied flats for life. In practice, in poorer parts of Poland, the process of buying out flats was slow. The high amount of money needed to buy a flat and the lack of clear economic benefits hindered the privatisation process. The only motives for buyout were: willingness to leave the heirs or fear of negative consequences of the change in the housing law (e.g., transfer to another, worse premises) [39].

Currently, in the Warmia and Mazury rural space, apart from farm buildings of individual farms, employee housing estates in all of the abovementioned architectural forms still function, constituting spatially and socially separated enclaves. They are inhabited both by people who have decided to buy apartments for their own use and by tenants. Residents of these housing estates are practically totally inhabited by former SOF employees.

### 3.2. Social-Economic Background

The investigated cases are located in the Braniewo, Bartoszyce and Lidzbark counties, which can be described as a typically post-state-owned farm areas. According to the data of the Voivodship Statistical Office in Olsztyn, in 1969 the share of agricultural land in SOF possession in these counties was 53.3%, 46.4% and 21.8% of the total agricultural land (the average for the Warmińsko-Mazurskie Voivodship was 32.8%). Half a century of the state economy affects the present condition of the surveyed areas, which is presented below:

- The total migration balance per 1000 population (average value for the period 2016–2018) reached value  $-6.61$  in Bartoszyce,  $-6.65$  in Braniewo and  $-4.28$  in Lidzbark counties, while the average for Poland was  $0.06$ ;
- The unemployment rate in 2018 was very high in the selected counties:  $19.2\%$  in Bartoszyce,  $21.2\%$  in Braniewo and  $14.6\%$  in Lidzbark, while average rate for Poland was  $5.8\%$ ;
- Professional activity was very low. The employed per 1000 population ratio was  $148$  in Bartoszyce,  $132$  in Braniewo and  $144$  in Lidzbark counties, while for Poland it reached a value of  $308$ ;
- Another indicator showing the poor condition of the areas is the length of public roads with hard surfaces (county and municipality owned) per  $100\text{ km}^2$  in kilometres:  $39.9$  in Bartoszyce,  $35.1$  in Braniewo,  $34.1$  in Lidzbark counties in comparison with the value for Poland  $80.3$ ;
- On the contrary, the number of passenger cars registered per 1000 inhabitants was relatively high for the counties:  $557$  in Bartoszyce,  $564$  in Braniewo and  $558$  in Lidzbark (average for Poland was  $539$ ).

The examined counties have a negative balance of domestic and foreign migration. It is also significantly lower than the national average. This result is largely related to the flaws of local labour markets. The rate of registered unemployment in these counties is high compared to those in the voivodship and in Poland. The high unemployment rates are accompanied by low professional activity—the number of employed people per 1000 is lower by  $25\%$  than the voivodship average and twice as low as the national average. Moreover, uneven and dispersed settlement can be observed in the counties under study, accompanied by the density index for public roads with hard surface (county and commune roads) per  $100\text{ km}^2$ , which is half the average value for Poland. The limited availability of public transport makes it necessary to use one's own means of transport, which results in a relatively high number of registered passenger cars per 1000 inhabitants. However, the counties' area is not evenly covered with cars. There are still villages where there are no cars or are rarely used due to the high cost of fuel and repairs of damage caused by using poor quality roads. To summarise, the counties under study have special features in common: they have a significant share of areas occupied by SOF in the past, high unemployment rates and low economic activity of the inhabitants. Moreover, they have an emigration tendency and insufficient development of road infrastructure in common. The presented characteristics correspond to the descriptions of enclave structures.

#### 4. Four Cases—Four Stories

##### 4.1. County of Braniewo—The Village of Jankówko

The village of Jankówko is located in the Braniewo county, in the municipality of Wilczęta. It is 20–30 km away from the nearest towns (Orneta, Pieniężno), which can be reached in 30 min by car. The spatial isolation of the village is increased by very weak and disappearing mobile telephone coverage, the poor condition of the access road surface and a damaged bridge (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.** Access road to the village of Jankówko. The inscription says “A damaged bridge threatens to collapse”. Source: Photo taken by Author.

Under the socialist regime, the village served as a housing estate for the State Owned Farm’s employees. At present, the village has only a few inhabitants (about 20 people). The main residential building is a multi-family house, neglected and deprived of basic comforts, managed by the NSCA (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Multi-family residential building in Jankówko. Source: Photo taken by Author.

The technical condition of buildings can be described as being below a decent standard of living. Due to the spatial isolation, the respondents did not see the value of cash money because it is difficult for them to shop and they did not take into account the possibility of saving. According to the statement of an employee of an institution dealing with activation of former state-owned farming communities, the inhabitants of this village who are engaged in community service ask for payment in food products, because even reaching the nearest shop is problematic for them—there is no public transport or individual transport in the village (despite favourable statistics in the county), and the distance to the shop is too great to cover on foot. When asked about their reluctance to work, interviewees answered the following question: “Why do I need money? Where am I going to spend it?” During the summer season, the mobility of residents is slightly increased by cycling. As a result of spatial isolation, the whole village of Jankówko can be treated as a kind of enclave inhabited by people accustomed to very low standards of living. The lifestyle is well characterised by the statement of a former inhabitant of another SOF housing estate: “A toilet in many places is still a luxury. There are many barracks covered only with eternite. In the apartment you will see moisture on the walls and the tiled stove, which is still burning today. This is the luxury they have received for their hard physical work from dawn to dusk. The socialist period gave life at a minimum level” [40].

#### 4.2. County of Olsztyn (Formerly Lidzbark Warmiński)—The Village of Komalwy

The village of Komalwy is located in the former Lidzbark county, in the municipality of Świątki. The nearest towns (Dobre Miasto, Miłakowo) are about 20 km away and they can be reached by car within about 20 min. The village is poorly connected with the nearby town, which offers unskilled workers jobs in shifts. Villagers feel isolated due to public transport that does not satisfy their needs. The subjective sense of isolation and neglect, on the other hand, is presented in the story of a four-person family (two parents, 58 and 63, and their two adult children, 32 and 18) living in one of the buildings managed by NSCA. When the SOF existed, the family lived in a flat located in a manor house (Figure 7a). The building was privatised, and the family was relocated to a two-family building nearby (Figure 7b).



**Figure 7.** Residential building formerly used by SOF employees (a) and nowadays (b). Source: Photo taken by Marcin Janusz (a) and Author (b).

The current living space consists of one room with a kitchenette and a bathroom. The family lives in a sense of social isolation: “You can’t receive guests in this one room”, and being forgotten: “No one has been interested in us since the SOF was closed down. No one from the institutions will come to see what conditions we live in” (a statement by a 58-year-old inhabitant). As a result, the family under study and its neighbours form an enclave of people living in a sense of grievance and neglect on the part of the system in which they live. From the date of SOF liquidation and loss of job, the family mother remains unemployed: “After the SOF was closed, I went to the employment office and they

sent me to the municipal office. Then, I was sent back to the employment office. So I gave up.” At the same time, the family shows symptoms of reproductive inactivity of women: “My daughter finished school in June. I will keep her at home for the winter and maybe she will look for something for next summer.”

#### 4.3. County of Olsztyn (Formerly Lidzbark Warmiński)—The Village of Kunik

The village of Kunik is located in the former Lidzbark county, in the municipality of Bartoszyce. The nearest town (Bartoszyce) is about 10 km away and it can be reached by car within about 10 min. The uniqueness of this village does not consist in its spatial isolation, but in the specificity of its buildings and identity of its inhabitants. At the time of the SOF, the whole village of Kunik was a housing estate exclusively for the farm workers. Therefore, the uniqueness of the village is evidenced by the exceptional professional homogeneity of its inhabitants (former employees of the SOF) and specific architecture that stands out in the rural landscape (Figure 8).



**Figure 8.** Multi-family residential building in the village of Kunik. Source: Photo taken by Author.

The village is an interesting example of an enclave created by the specificity of its inhabitants and not by spatial isolation. The inhabitants are united by a common history and a sense of grievance caused by systemic changes, but the village is not a place of particular negative socio-economic phenomena. The vast majority of the apartments have been purchased by private users—only one building is still administered by the NSCA. As a result, the structure becomes partially open—thanks to the possibility of private property trading, new residents from outside the SOF environment are slowly and gradually coming to the estate. Therefore, one can predict that in the future the village will lose its distinctiveness as an enclave. The adaptation and positive social changes taking place in this village are to a large extent the result of the activities of the local leader—a very active lady *soltys*<sup>5</sup>. Thanks to her efforts, the village inhabitants take care of public space and organise local festivities in summer. In the local opinion, the village has lost its negative image of a former state-owned farmstead village, thanks to which it integrates with its surroundings.

<sup>5</sup> *Solctwo* is the supportive unit for the municipality and it is managed by *soltys*.

#### 4.4. County of Bartoszyce—The Village of Borki

The village of Borki is located in the Bartoszyce county, in the municipality of Dobre Miasto. It is about 3 km away from the nearest towns (Dobre Miasto), which can be reached by car within 3 min. The village of Borki is characterized by its historic architecture—manor buildings, which after World War II were converted into flats for the employees of the SOF. During the survey, most of the apartments were bought out by private owners, but some of them were still administered by the NSCA (Figure 9).



**Figure 9.** Multi-family residential building in the village of Borki. Source: Photo taken by Author.

The village is an example of an enclave where the majority of its inhabitants share the same job (former farm workers) and a visible degree of poverty (cramped flats in very poor technical condition). On the other hand, the fact that there is no control over the renovation investments made in the State Treasury's resources is proof of neglect.

Lack of care of the technical condition of buildings increases the feeling of rejection and neglect in their inhabitants, and living conditions below standards lock them in an enclave of isolation. The examined family consists of two unemployed parents and eight adult children. Adults earn their living from casual and seasonal work (construction work, mushroom picking). Adult children go to temporary work and live in the family home when they are unemployed. The technical conditions of a flat are below the standard of a decent living, but its inhabitants are passive in this respect—while working on construction sites, they do not carry out any renovation work on the rented flat at the same time. When asked about the assessment of living conditions and the sense of place in the social structure, they respond: "Our greatest success is that we have raised eight children and none of them have ever been in prison."

## 5. Discussion

The emergence of permanent enclaves with negative features may be an external effect of the policy pursued with regard to the coordination of the migration process or planning the location of large economic entities distant from existing settlement networks. As research of scientists from all over the world [7,19–26] underline that enclaves are often fostered by the socially unbalanced economic objectives, as industries or farms located far from the existing settlement and technical

infrastructure network are accompanied by the creation of worker's camps. By settling in a new location, their inhabitants form isolated social circles.

Workers' settlements can develop into enclaves of isolation and neglect. This phenomenon is proving to be extremely problematic in practice as it generates high social costs (enclaves usually accumulate social problems). If a structure of this type (a monopolistic employer and an isolated workers' housing estate concentrated around it) functions long enough, it becomes unexpectedly durable. An example of the survival of this specific structure is the housing estates of former state-owned farm workers in Poland. With the liquidation of the SOF, it was expected that the market economy mechanism would itself solve the problem of the redundant workers. It was expected that some people would find employment in newly established enterprises, some would establish their own farms and the rest would move out to more favourable locations. In practice, this proved to be only partially true. The combination of getting used, lack of own savings and entrepreneurial features, and having the right to buy or rent an employee flat resulted in the fact that 30 years after the liquidation of state-owned farms, employee housing estates became permanent enclaves and still cut off from rural space. The structure, which was intended to be temporary, survived and became a permanent element of the space. Inhabitants, who do not have sufficient motivation to change, have become accustomed to living in a low-standard post-worker enclave, while at the same time cultivating a sense of neglect and abandonment by state and local institutions.

Workers' settlements are not a phenomenon characteristic only of the socialist past. Currently, such settlement structures are also being created, especially for immigrants performing physical work for local production plants or farms (e.g., Piaseczno in Poland). Local authorities should pay particular attention to the risk of enclaves being created in these places, which, together with the economic crisis (which is predicted, for example, in the subsequent COVID-19 pandemic), may start to accumulate negative phenomena such as low labour activity, abuse of stimulants or violence. It is worth undertaking extended research on the factors stimulating the formation of the enclaves, as well as on the factors conditioning their sustainability, which—as the example of former state-owned farm workers' settlements shows— may last for decades.

## 6. Conclusions

The feature that connects the enclaves is their distinctiveness. It may have an objective dimension when the identity results from the spatial isolation or homogeneity of the enclave structure, as well as a subjective one, i.e., it may be the result of a sense of distinctness in relation to the environment. Enclaves often focus on negative socio-economic processes and phenomena. The emergence and functioning of socially and economically problematic enclaves are favoured by spatial and economic mismatches. Such structures are often created in places where employee housing estates were established for the only employer in the area, spatially isolated from the existing settlement network. These settlements turn into specific enclaves, which acquire particularly negative features at the moment of collapse or completion of the project. If the population does not disperse naturally, the workers' enclaves gradually turn into enclaves of isolation and neglect.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to answer the question if workers' housing complexes can turn into permanent enclaves of isolation and neglect after the liquidation of a monopolistic workplace. The answer is positive, and the example of such structures can be the employee housing estates of former SOF employees, spatially scattered in the landscape of a village in north-eastern Poland. They are characterized by spatial isolation, resulting from the distance from the other towns and villages and the layout of national roads; poor technical condition of municipality and county roads leading to the village; lack of, or insufficiently developed access to, public transport and disappearing access to mobile phone networks. Moreover, these places are distinguished by their specific architecture and professional homogeneity of the inhabitants (former employees of the SOF). The inhabitants of these villages are united by a low standard of living and housing conditions, as well as a sense of harm and being neglected by the representatives of institutions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the

post-SOF estates preserved in the landscape of the north-eastern Poland are still an unresolved social and economic problem of enclaves of isolation and neglect in the Polish rural space of the 21st century. The only hope for beneficial changes seems to be the existence of a local leader—a person who will motivate the inhabitants of these enclaves to take greater care of themselves and the surrounding space. As the example of one of the villages shows, the grassroots initiative of the inhabitants may open a closed structure and contribute to integration with the environment.

The presented study takes Warmia and Mazury, a region of Poland, as a case study. Although this research is limited to four cases, the issues presented above may be relevant to other regions where large factory workers' housing estates were or are currently being built in the distance from the existing settlement network. Moreover, the evidence presented in this article suggests that responsible and smart land management regulations require taking into account the consequences of planning employee settlements in specific locations, as they can transform into permanent social structures with enclave characteristics. Nonetheless, the presented study has some limitations. The major limitation is an access to reliable information—respondents with negative experiences with representatives of various government institutions are reluctant to give answers, and the answers given are characterised by subjective prejudices and filled with a sense of harm. Moreover, the free form interview is timeconsuming, as the collection of information takes place during long hours of conversations with respondents who gradually open up to the person conducting the survey.

Further research can contribute to the improvement of this study. It would be worthwhile to enrich the study with an analysis of former employees' settlements created around plants other than SOFs. Further research would allow to gain an even better understanding of the process and would also allow to obtain answers to further research question—are permanent enclaves formed only by low-skilled manual workers or also by, e.g., workers qualified but specialized in a narrow field?

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