

The territorial exchange between Poland and the USSR in 1951: demographic development and settlement network transformation over a 70-year period

Roman Lozynskyy^{1, CDFMR}, Roman Slyvka^{2, CMR}, Viktoriya Pantyley^{3, DM},
Yulian Braychevskyy^{4, MR}

¹Ivan Franko National University of Lviv, Faculty of Geography, Department of Geography of Ukraine, 79-007 Lviv, Ukraine, e-mail: roman.lozynskyy@lnu.edu.ua (corresponding author), <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5435-7636>; ²Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, Department of Geography and Nature Studies e-mail: roman.slyvka@pnu.edu.ua, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6657-3667>; ³Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Institute of Socio-Economic Geography and Spatial Management, Department of Socio-Economic Geography, 20-718 Lublin, Poland e-mail: viktoriya.pantyley@mail.umcs.pl, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7340-292X>; ⁴Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Regional Studies and Tourism Department, 03022 Kyiv Ukraine, e-mail: yulian_braychevskyy@knu.ua, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7709-6077>

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Abstract. In this article, we present a comparative analysis of the demographic development and changes in the settlement network over the last 70 years in the territories exchanged in 1951 between the USSR and Poland. We found that, within the territory ceded to the USSR, the traditional settlement pattern was restored and the settlement network was renewed up to 90%. Industrialization in the area resulted in the population growth reaching, at maximum, 40% greater numbers than in 1939. The territory ceded to Poland featured a “colonizational” pattern of resettlement and the population size remained much smaller as compared to 1951, directly before the exchange. However, in Poland, local people faced no obstacles to returning to the area. Conversely, the USSR deported most of the local inhabitants to distant parts of Ukraine and prevented people from the neighbouring locations from entering the area. Overall, based on the resettlement policy comparison we argue that, on the part of the USSR, an important rationale behind the exchange was to strengthen totalitarian control over the western regions of Ukraine by means of deportation and population dispersion.

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1. Introduction

As of late April 2022, roughly 5.2 million people have left Ukraine, according to the UN Refugee Agency data, because of the war that Russia launched on the country on 24th February, 2022. Of those people, Poland has accepted the largest share, namely 2.9 million (URS, 2022). According to Union of Polish Metropolises, Bieszczady powiat is among the regions experiencing the largest population growth due to the refugee inflow (*Kartografia ekstremalna*, 2022). The village of Lodyna has become a major destination, where refugees are camped in a former school building (Wbieszczady, 2022). Lodyna is an old Boikos village. However, back in 1951, the Soviet government forcefully displaced all of its population to the village of Zmiivka of the Berislav raion (district, a level of Ukraine's administrative division) in Kherson oblast as part of the territory exchange deal between the USSR and Poland. Zmiivka became the major destination for the displaced people from the area in the modern-day Bieszczady powiat, which was transferred to Poland in a territory exchange between the USSR and Poland in 1951. That year, nearly 2,500 people moved there from the village of Lodyna, as well as from the villages of Dolishni Berehy and Nanovy. Bieszczadians make up nearly 80% of the village population. In March 2022, Zmiivka became a combat zone and approached humanitarian catastrophe. In May 2022, Russian troops occupied the village. Some inhabitants managed to flee (someone may have reached Poland), but later, the Russian military blocked the village without letting anyone out. They also blocked any humanitarian aid from entering Zmiivka. Other settlements in the South of Ukraine (in Donetsk, Mykolaiv and Kherson oblasts), where Boikos were forcefully displaced back in 1951, are now facing the same fate. Authoritarian Russia calls itself the legal successor of the USSR and continues Stalinist-type policies, once again ruining human destinies.

The 1951 480-km² borderland exchange between the USSR and Poland is still subject to numerous academic debates. Historians and experts in adjacent fields discuss its necessity and the real reasons behind it. There is plenty of academic literature focusing on the political preconditions for the exchange, its demographic and economic consequences, its socio-cultural implications, as well as the fates of the people whom totalitarian regimes forced to leave their homeland. However, for various reasons, those were mostly separate accounts by either Ukrainian or Polish analysts that

lacked comparisons between the situations on the territories in question right before the exchange and in the following decades.

The goal of this article is to compare demographic developments and settlement network changes within the territories exchanged by Poland and the USSR in 1951. Such comparison will contribute to better understanding of spatial development and present-day social processes in the exchanged areas and facilitate the debate on the necessity and parity of the exchange.

2. Theoretical and methodological basics

Respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity is a cornerstone principle of modern international relations. In this regard, establishing sovereign control over a territory must respect the interests of all parties concerned. Territorial acquisition through voluntary concession is a possible lawful way of meeting such interests. The most common way is that of a small territory exchange based on inter-state negotiations. In the 21st century, instances of small borderland territory exchanges include deals between Ukraine and Moldova, Belgium and the Netherlands, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Specially arranged borderland commissions negotiate borderline corrections by resolving controversies arising from either inadequate border delimitation in the past or recent environmental changes. Exchanges of larger territories are much rarer and take the form of either unilateral or bilateral cession. This way, states can lawfully acquire territory, and, since the method is consensual, it is presumably the most practically relevant one today (Dörn, 2019).

Local population support adds legitimacy to territorial exchange and ensures a conflict-free borderland transfer. However, authoritarian regimes usually do not consult with the public. They either ignore democratic procedures for getting popular support or simply stage shows of such procedures. This applies to the Polish–Soviet territory exchange in 1951 – the biggest territory exchange the socialist bloc states ever made. In late 1950, the Moscow government informed their Warsaw counterparts about the exchange proposal and invited Poland's representatives to discuss technical details. Aleksander Zawadzki, a Deputy Prime Minister and active Party member (Polish United Workers' Party) led Poland's delegation. He held the power to accept Soviet proposals (Eberhardt, 2018). However, being a subordinate partner to the USSR, Poland's government evidently lacked the independence to make such decisions.

In present-day Europe, similar territorial exchanges are rather improbable, since the international community favors the principle of state territorial integrity. Besides, democratic decision-making procedures may cause uncertainty, and governments may find it difficult to persuade inhabitants to become citizens of another state.

Of all territory exchange outcomes, demographic shifts are among the most complicated. Territories are often transferred unpopulated, upon prior displacement of local communities. Sometimes inhabitants are given a choice to stay or leave. After that, various resettlement practices take place.

Both lands exchanged between Poland and the USSR were originally parts of larger territorial units and therefore had to be administratively rearranged. The area acquired by the USSR became *Zabuzhzhia* raion of Lviv oblast, with the town of Belz as its administrative center. The raion ceased to exist in 1962, but the name *Zabuzhzhia* (Trans-Buh region, “land beyond the Buh river”) remained in use among Ukrainian historians. That name referred strictly to the area acquired in 1951. We also use this name in our present analysis. Today, *Zabuzhzhia* belongs to Chervonohrad raion in Lviv oblast and is part of Sokal and Chervonohrad Territorial Communities.

The area acquired by Poland did not become a separate administrative unit. In fact, the administrative division of Poland changed several times over the late 20th century. As of today, the area in question belongs to the Bieszczady powiat of the Subcarpathian Voivodeship with its administrative center in the town of Ustrzyki Dolne. Bieszczady powiat includes other territories too, its area being 2.3 times larger than the acquired land. There was no specific name coined for the transferred area. Ukrainian authors generally prefer the ethnographic title of “West Boikivschyna” (“West Boikos’ region”). However, the actual area of Boikos’ settlement is much larger than the exchanged land. In Polish literature, one may find such titles as “Bieszczady”, “Ustrzyk Dolne region”, “West Boikivschyna” (this last is much rare). In this research, for convenience purposes, we mostly call the area in question “The Transferred Area in Bieszczady” (TAB). In all instances, by this name we mean only the territory acquired by Poland in 1951 and not the wider geographic region (in its wider meaning, Bieszczady is part of the Carpathian mountain range).

In this research, we primarily use comparative analysis based on statistical data and literary sources covering demographic developments and settlement network changes within the territories that were exchanged between Poland and the USSR in 1951.

We use census data to analyze population dynamics. We also use maps and charts for comparisons.

We refer to V. Kubiiovych (1983) for the data on population size – of whole areas as well as individual settlements – in 1939, on the verge of World War II. Kubiiovych himself compiled the data from the Polish census of 1931, local church records and witness accounts. Data on population dynamics of the post-War *Zabuzhzhia* comes from the Soviet censuses of 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989, and Ukrainian census of 2001. Current population data are as of 2021. For the TAB population analysis, we used the Polish censuses of 1960, 1970, 1978, 1988, 2002 and 2011.

3. Literature review

Overall, Polish accounts offer a much better insight into the outcomes of the 1951 territory exchange compared to Ukrainian sources. Polish authors cover demographic developments in the exchanged area mostly in a wider framework of settling the south-east borderlands, after operation “Wisła”, Akcja HT-1951 and other resettlement campaigns. M. Chilczuk (1959) was among the first to address development problems of the TAB. In 1960s, the TAB settlement and immigrant composition drew greater attention of historians, ethnographers and geographers alike. A. Mariansky (1961a, 1961b, 1962, 1963, 1964) explored settlement patterns in Ustrzyca powiat. H. Jadam (1975, 1976) explored TAB settlers’ cultural integration. M. Biernacka (1962, 1973, 1974, 1989) shed some light on the ethnographic aspect of the TAB population, focusing on the Greek community brought there in 1950. Bieszczadian Greeks have also caught the attention of R. Witalec (2009) and M. Romański (2008). A. Wawryniuk (2012a, 2012b, 2015) and P. Eberhardt (2018) presented a more detailed political analysis of the territory exchange, as did Z. Wojcik (2009) and J. Tebinka (1994).

Another strain of research touches upon the fate of *Zabuzhzhia* emigrants, who were forced to leave their homes in 1951. As the soviet-era Polish government made this topic taboo, it was not until the collapse of the Socialist bloc that numerous emigrant accounts as well as archived documents were published, shedding more light on the displacement of people (Buziewicz, 2001; Potaczała, 2017; Trzeszczyńska, 2016). In recent years, the monographs *Bieszczady w Polsce Ludowej 1944–1989* (Izdebski et al., 2009) and *Bojkowszczyzna zachodnia – wczoraj, dziś i jutro* (Wolski, 2009) offer the most comprehensive analysis of Bieszczady demographic developments in the late 20th century.

In the USSR, any discussion of the forced displacement from West Boikivschyna to the steppe villages in the South of Ukraine was taboo. Zabuzhzhia, for the most part, appeared in academic literature in the light of economic development, namely Lviv Volyn coal basin exploration. F. Zastavnyi (1956) was among the first to give an account of that economic region. Yet, demography and resettlement in Zabuzhzhia remained mostly unexplored. It was not until Ukraine's independence that the 1951 territory exchange was studied from multiple perspectives. It was mostly historians who turned their attention towards this event. I. Nitochko (2016) and N. Kliashorna (2006) scrutinized the exchange, calling it "the last deportation in Ukraine". They based their research on both witness accounts among the displaced people and archived documents. I. Nadolskyi (2008) presented a more general picture of the Stalinist regime deportation policies in the western regions of Ukraine. R. Popp (2016) and V. Kyslyi (2009) studied, among other things, the impact that displacement had upon people's fates.

Analysis of the available literature easily reveals the lack of a comparative perspective on population displacement and the ensuing resettlement of the exchanged territories, which we find to be a major research gap. Ukrainian accounts do not pay sufficient attention to Zabuzhzhia resettlement after the exchange. Polish sources, in their turn, address neither demographic shifts within the TAB with proper statistical references nor changes in the settlement network.

4. Results

On 5th February 1951, in Moscow, Soviet and Polish representatives signed the treaty on exchanging portions of state territories with a total area of 480 km². The USSR acquired part of Lublin Voivodeship containing coal deposits and ceded Nizhnia Ustryciza (Ustrzyki Dolne) raion of Drohobyska oblast with several adjacent villages, an area with oil deposits, to Poland. It took almost nine months to complete the transfer, including government ratification of the treaty, border demarcation, people displacement, property transfer, etc. The treaty on the completion of the land and people exchange was signed on 17 November 1951 in Lviv (Wawryniuk, 2012a; Wawryniuk, 2012b; Wójcik, 2009; Eberhardt, 2018) (Fig. 1).

Officially, the exchange was made for economic reasons. The USSR was planning to mine coal from

the Lviv-Volyn basin. For that purpose, it needed to adjust the border in order to get a convenient transport connection and widen the area containing coal. Poland, on the other hand, acquired several oil deposits in the Prykarpattia (Subcarpathia region) along with the opportunity to build a hydropower station on the San river, the design project for which dated back to 1921. Initially, Poland wished to exchange a larger area including the towns of Nyzhankovychi, Dobrómyl and Khyriv, all three connected with the railway. But the USSR demanded an extra payment of \$150 million, which was too much for Poland at the time (Eberhardt, 2018). After ratifying the 1951 exchange, the Polish and Soviet governments set out to work on the further exchange (and population displacement) of even bigger borderland areas. Poland expected to receive the aforementioned territory with the towns of Nyzhankovychi, Dobrómyl and Khyriv together with the adjacent villages, and the USSR would get new lands to the west of the Buh (may also be spelled "Bug") river, including the town of Hrubieszów. The Soviet government sent the proposal to Poland in late 1952 so that the exchange itself would supposedly take place in 1953. However, after Stalin's death and a softening of the Soviet regime, the project was terminated (Tebinka, 1994).

Prior to World War II, both Zabuzhzhia and TAB were quite densely populated and had complex networks of settlements developed throughout the centuries. The misfortunes of the war and of post-war displacement significantly reduced the population of both areas.

In 1939, on the verge of World War II, the population of Zabuże was about 60,000 people (Fig. 2). Overall, there were two towns (Belz and Uhniv) and 49 villages. In almost all the villages, the vast majority were Ukrainians, with the exception of two German colonies. In the towns of Belz and Uhniv, as well as in Varyazh and Christinopil, which once also had town privileges, the majority of the population was Jewish (V. Kubiiiovych, 1983). Due to the tragic events of the war (military actions, the Holocaust, exchange and deportation of the population, adverse living conditions, etc.), the number of residents in the region dropped by 75% and at the time of the territorial exchange between the USSR and Poland only about 14,400 people lived there. All of them were relocated to Poland. This action is called "Action H-T" in the Polish literature. More than 50 percent of people were relocated to the annexed western and southern lands, about 30 per cent to Bieszczady, and 20 percent joined their families in the Hrubieszow and Tomaszow regions or other

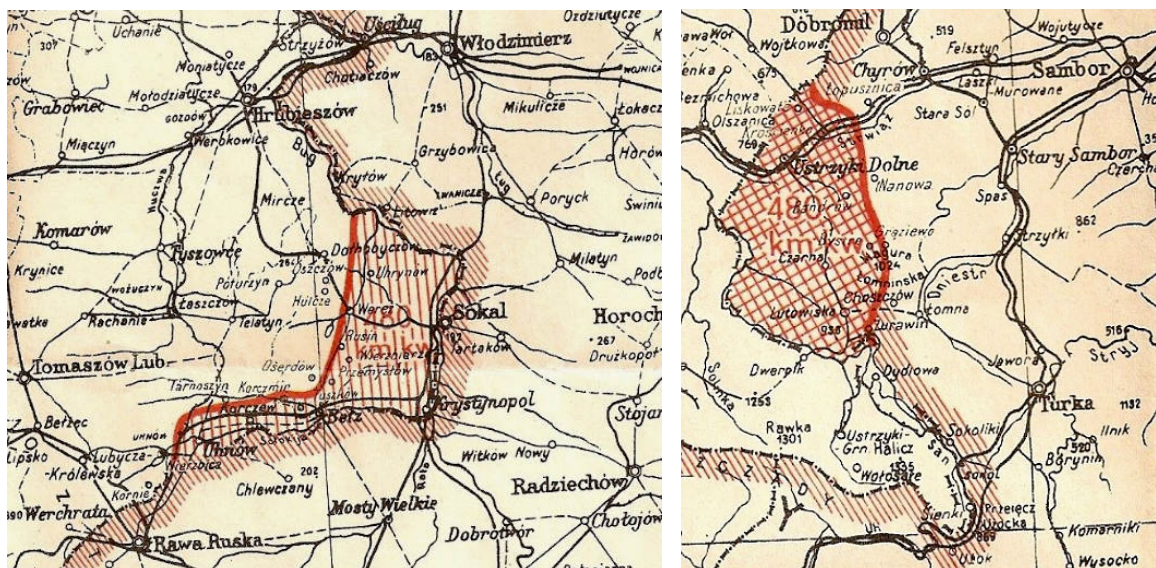
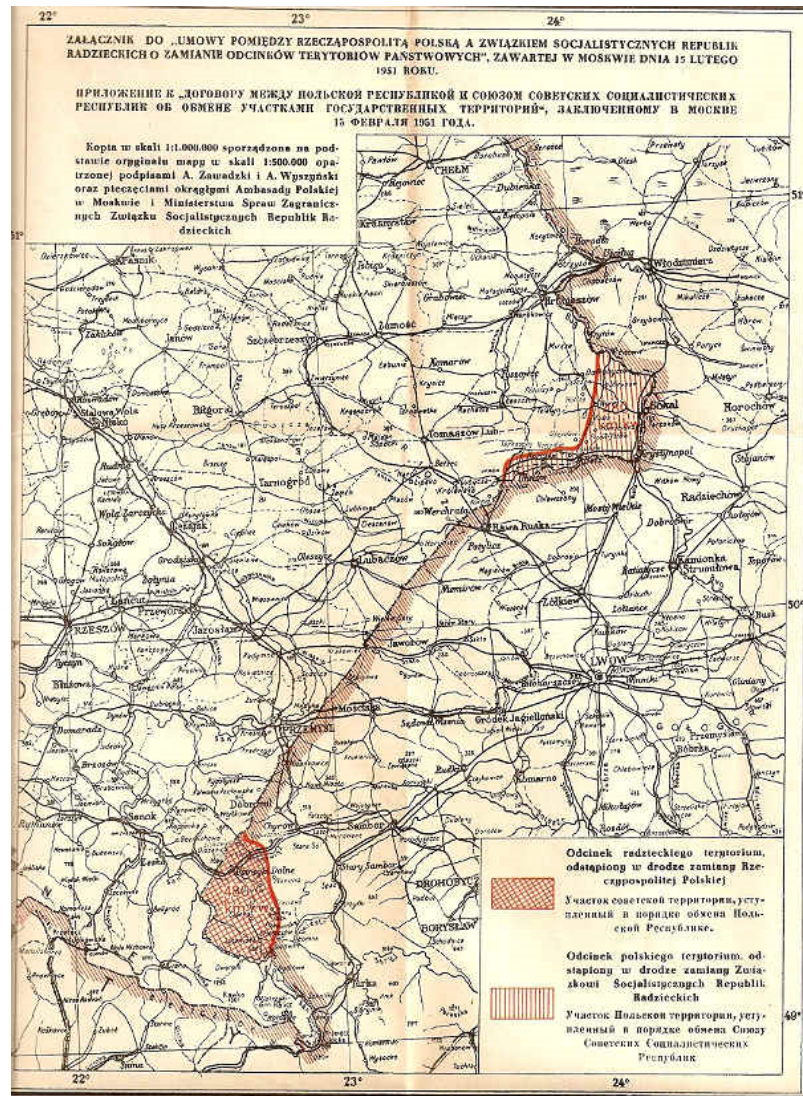


Fig. 1. Official map of territory exchange in 1951
Source: A Kliashtorna (2011)

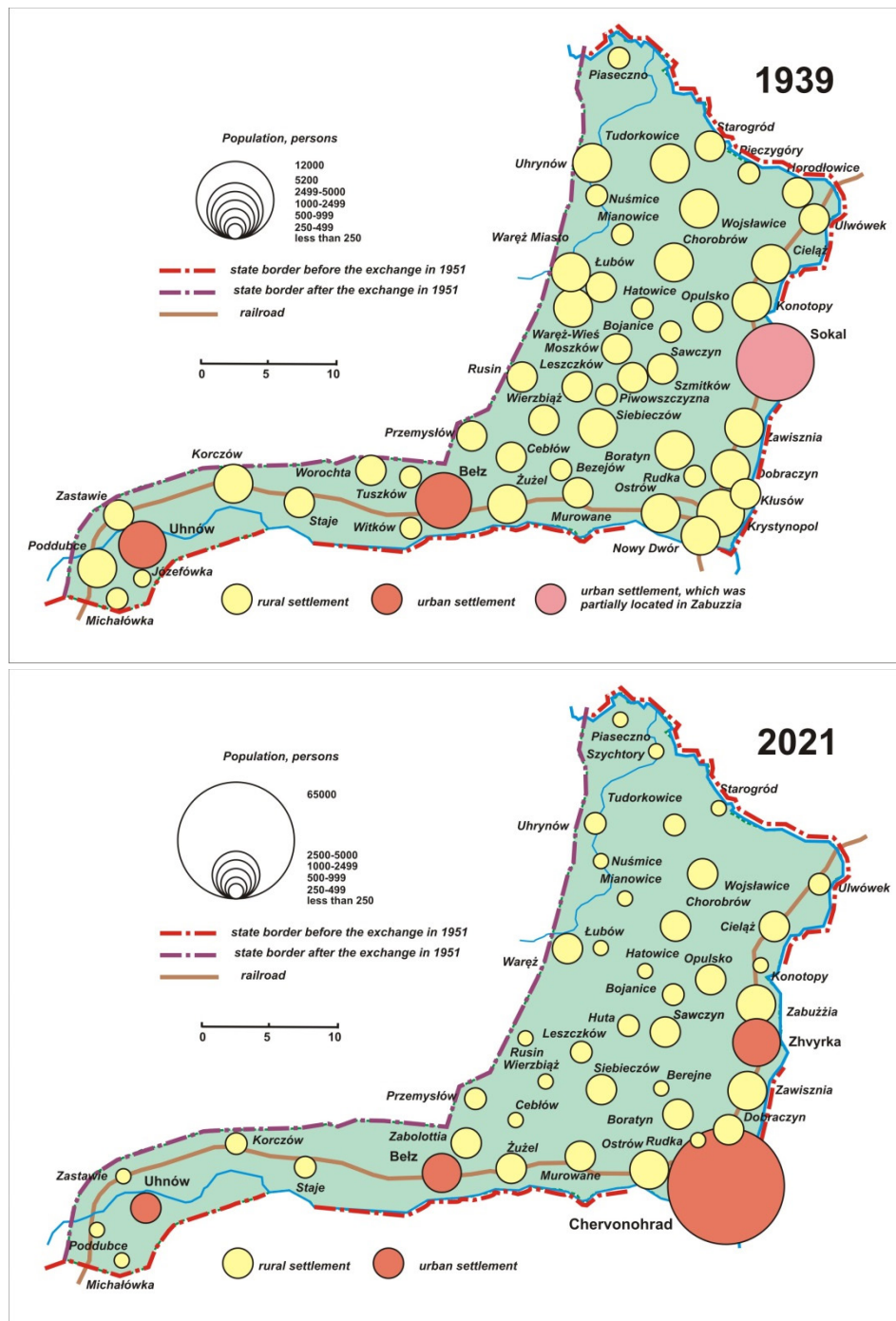


Fig. 2. Settlement network of Zabuzhzhia in 1939 and 2021

Source: own work based on V. Kubiiovych (1983) and current population data for 2021

regions of Poland (Trzeszczyńska, 2016; Potaczała, 2017; Buziewicz, 2001).

The composition of the displaced persons was very heterogeneous. As early as 1951, several hundred people from the families of railway workers who had previously lived within the TAB were relocated to Zabuże. They had to lay the rails to bring the track's width up to the Soviet

standard (1,524 mm, or 5 feet). The next group of the displaced were residents of the foothills and mountain regions of the Stanislav and Drohobych regions. Some of them were forcibly displaced as punishment for their disloyalty to the Soviet authorities. Such a fate befell the inhabitants of the villages of Hvozdet, Smerechna, Krushelnytsia and Khitar in the Drohobych region, and Zelenyi

Yar and Sredniy Uhryniv in the Stanislav region. In total, several thousand people were displaced. Another large group of displaced persons was of residents of remote “unpromising” mountain villages and hamlets in the Precarpathian region. It was a so called “voluntary-forced” migration. People were convinced to move voluntarily to the Zabuże region, where housing abandoned by former residents, fertile lands and a more favorable climate were promised. However, in the case of refusal, they faced the threat of deportation to the eastern regions of the USSR, Siberia and the Far East. A total of 669 families from the Stanislav region were relocated to the Zabuże district in 1952, i.e. about 3–4,000 people (Nadolskyi, 2008; Kyslyi, 2009; Popp, 2016).

Former residents of Zabuże who were displaced from there to the area of the Ukrainian SSR in 1944–1946 were initially not allowed to return to their home villages; they were given this permission only a few years after the exchange. This can probably be explained by social and political changes in the

USSR after Stalin's death in 1953. The process of their return stretched over many years. On the other hand, the inhabitants of Ukrainian nationality forcibly displaced in 1947 as part of the so-called “Wisła action”, to western and northern Poland were not able to return to their home villages after 1953.

Immediately in 1951, party and Soviet functionaries began to arrive in Zabuże to form the governing bodies. They were mostly Russians from different regions of the USSR and Ukrainians from the East and Center of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, often Russian-speaking. A few years later, families of miners from the Donbass began arriving to develop the coal industry. In total, by the end of the 1950s, about 3,000 Russians and about 6,000 Ukrainians from the central and eastern regions of the Ukrainian SSR had settled in Zabuże. They were mostly accommodated in Chervonograd (Krystynopol until 1951), which was actively developing as an industrial center, and in Belz, which was a district center.

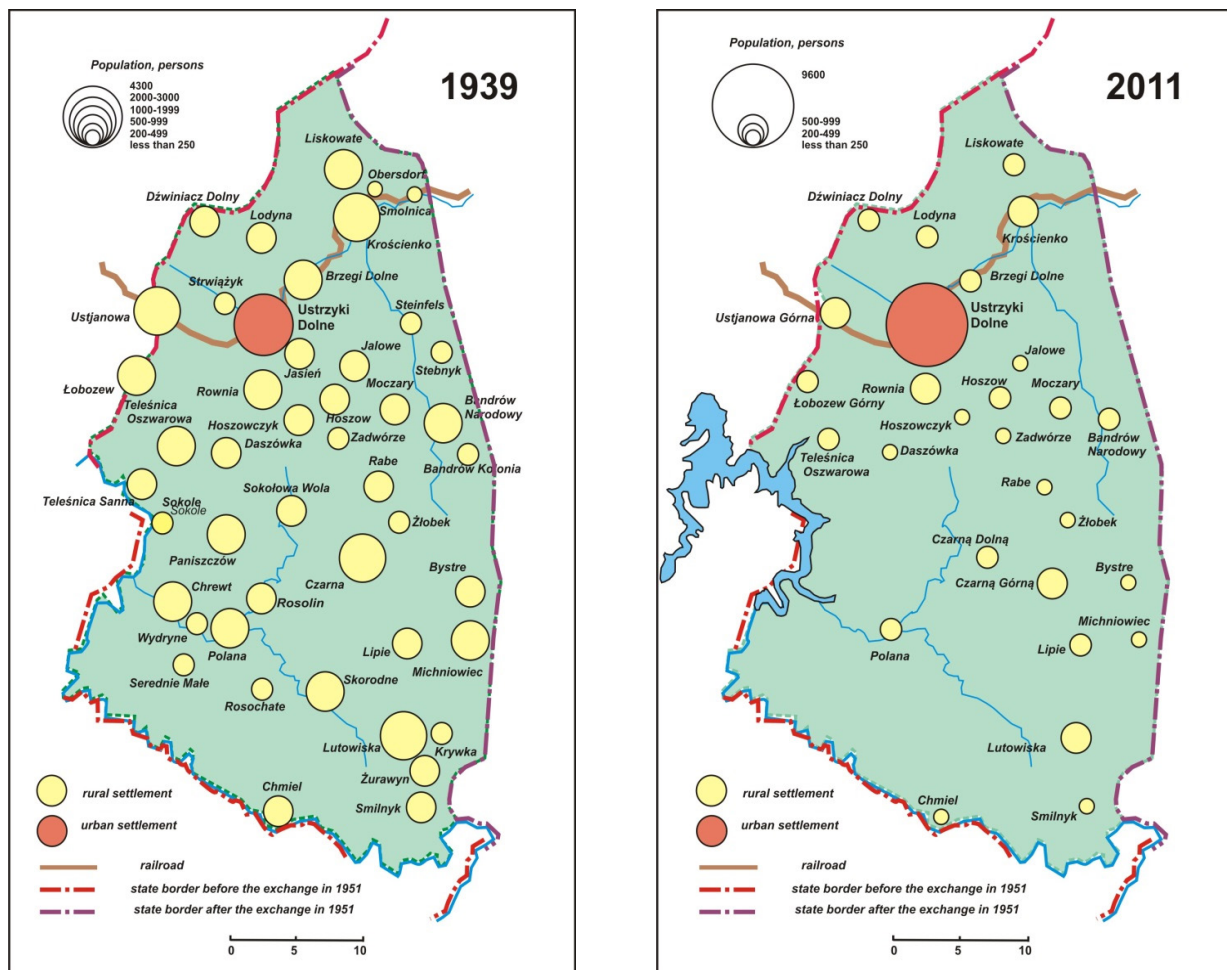


Fig. 3. Settlement network of the area handed over to Poland in 1951, in 1939 and 2011

Source: own work based on V. Kubiiyoch (1983) and data from Polish censuses for 2011

As of 1959 (the year of the first post-war census), about 45,000 inhabitants resided in Zabuże, i.e. 75 percent of the pre-war population. The issue of settlement was generally resolved. The pre-war settlement network was ostensibly preserved. Only a few settlements declined. In the decades that followed, the industrialization of the region continued. Chervonograd developed intensively: its population in the early 1980s exceeded the number of inhabitants of all pre-war Zabuże. The rural population decreased. The total number of inhabitants in Zabuże at the time of Ukraine's declaration of independence exceeded 100,000 people, 70 percent of whom lived in Chervonograd. Later, affected by the negative economic and demographic processes, the population of Zabuże started to decline.

In 1939, there were 45 villages and one town – Ustrzyki Dolne (Fig. 3) – within the TAB. The total population before the war was over 45,000 people. In all the villages except the three small German colonies and the village of Lutowska, the vast majority of residents were Ukrainians, often 80–90 percent and above. In the town of Ustrzyki Dolne and the village of Lutowska, the relative majority of the population was Jewish (V. Kubiiiovych, 1983).

The demographic losses of the TAB during World War II were smaller. In 1951, on the eve of the territorial exchange, about 32,100 people lived here, which is more than 70 percent compared to 1939. All of them were displaced. The majority (more than 95 percent) were relocated to the southern regions of Ukraine: Mykolayiv, Odesa, Stalin, Kherson (Kliashstorna, 2006; Kyslyi, 2009; Nitochko, 2016). The families of collective farmers were sent there. The families of railway workers were moved to Zabuże. The families of oil workers were relocated to the Drohobych region, known for its oilfields (Popp, 2016).

In the process of resettlement of the TAB, the first wave of settlers was composed of the former residents of Zabuże. Not all settlements were intended for the displaced; at the beginning there were only ten, then three more were added. In another six villages, they were meant to complement other groups of the displaced. In total, about 4,000 people were relocated. The priority in resettlement was given to the town of Ustrzyki and the villages adjacent to the railway. Some of the villages were not intended to be inhabited (especially those close to the border); a few years later, their houses were dismantled for firewood, etc. As a result, by the early 1960s, many pre-war villages had disappeared.

Another group of settlers was made up of Greeks and Macedonians, families of the supporters of the

Greek Democratic Army (the military formation of the Greek Communists) who had lost the civil war in Greece. Out of about 13,500 people accepted by Poland, about 2–3,000 moved to the TAB, in the vicinity of Krościenko. Starting from 1956, they began to move back, but some of the displaced and their descendants still lived in the TAB in the early 21st century (Biernacka, 1973; Romański, 2008; Witalec, 2009).

In the first years, no more than 7–8,000 people were relocated to the Ustrzyki Dolne district, about 11,000 at the time of the 1960 census – in other words, up to 25 percent of the pre-war population. The problem of settling the territory remained unresolved. The Economic Committee of the Council of Ministers of Poland in 1959 adopted Resolution No. 271/59 on the development of the Bieszczady region, which devoted considerable attention to the issue of stimulating resettlement. After this resolution, the image of Bieszczady as the “Polish Wild West” began to emerge. For the most part, young people moved for material reasons – they were given jobs and housing. Among the settlers, men prevailed. Women often went for seasonal work. Many migrants did not plan to stay in Bieszczady forever; after having improved their financial status, they would go back. The majority were displaced persons from Krakow Voivodeship. To support the displaced persons, the *Dodatek bieszczadzki* (a 10% bonus) was offered to those who traveled to the Ustrzyki, Sanok and Liskivskiy counties to work in forestry, healthcare and school education (Mariansky, 1961a; Mariansky, 1962; Mariansky, 1963; Mariansky, 1964; Biernacka, 1974; Jadam, 1976).

The settlement network was affected by the construction of the Solina hydroelectric power station. In 1968, the Solina reservoir was filled with water and some of the villages in the exchange area were partially flooded, or they were cut off from the transportation routes and declined (Panishchev, Teleshitsa-Sianna, Hrevt). Of all the settlements, Ustrzyki Dolne was the most developed as a center of woodworking and ski tourism.

In general, the pre-war population and settlement network could not be recovered. According to the 2011 census, the population of the exchanged area was 18,000 people (slightly more than 40 percent of that in 1939 and 57 percent of the population in 1951 before the exchange), of which more than half lived in Ustrzyki Dolne.

Table 1. Demographic developments and settlement network transformation on the territories exchanged in 1951 (comparative analysis)

Zabuzhzhia, Ukraine	TAB, Poland
<i>Area, km²</i>	
480	480
<i>Population, 1939</i>	
approximately 60,000	over 45,000
<i>Population, 1951 (prior to the exchange)</i>	
over 14,000	over 32,000
<i>Population, 2021</i>	
nearly 90,000	approximately 18,000
<i>Number of settlements, 1939</i>	
2 towns (Belz, Uhniv), 49 villages	1 town (Ustrzyki Dolne), 45 villages
<i>Number of settlements, 2021</i>	
4 towns (Belz, Uhniv, Chervonohrad, Zhvyrka) 40 villages	1 town (Ustrzyki Dolne), 27 villages
<i>Urbanization, 1939, %</i>	
15–20	Under 20
<i>Urbanization, 2021, %</i>	
80	52
<i>Destination of displaced persons. 1951 regions</i>	
Recently acquired regions in the west and north of Poland (over 50% of all displaced); Bieszczady (30%); Hrubieszów and Tomaszów powiaty (reunified with relatives, up to 20%); other regions	South of the Ukrainian SSR (Mykolaiv, Odesa, Stalin, Kherson oblasts, over 95%); Drohobych oblast (oil miners and their families); Zabuzhzhia (railway workers and their families)
<i>Place of origin of incoming settlers</i>	
Former Zabuzhzhia inhabitants of Ukrainian descent; Ukrainians from the adjacent areas; townspeople from the east of Ukrainian SSR and other parts of the USSR; other groups	Displaced Poles from Zabuzhzhia; people from Krakow Voivodeship (majority); Greeks and Macedonians; people from other voivodeships of Poland
<i>Returning of previously displaced people (1944–46 exchange)</i>	
Allowed to freely return as of 1953 (after Stalin's death), in some villages as of 1955, the process lasted till mid-1960s	Returned in insignificant numbers
<i>Newcomers from the ceded territories</i>	
Railway workers and their family members from the TAB	nearly 4,000 people from Zabuzhzhia during the first wave of displacement
<i>Foreign and other ethnicity newcomers</i>	
Russians, Belarusians, Tatars, Jews and other ethnicities of the USSR (at first, Party workers and administrative staff; later, coal miners)	Greeks and Macedonians – Greek Democratic Army supporters with their families (later, some of them returned to Greece)
<i>Disappeared settlements</i>	
16 villages: 5 were not resettled, 1 became depopulated, 8 were merged with other settlements	18 villages: 7 were not resettled, 8 either deteriorated after resettlement attempts or were flooded, 3 merged with Ustrzyki Dolne
<i>Settlement renamings</i>	
16 villages were fully renamed, 13 villages had their names Russified, after 1991 most of the settlements took back their former names	1 village(Lutowska) took back its pre-war name, others – pre-war Polish spelling? 5(?) villages were renamed in 1977, in 1981 took their previous names back

continue Table 1

<i>Demographic developments since 1951</i>	
By 1960, under 75% of the pre-war population; by 1970 – population surpassed pre-war numbers; population of Chervonohrad increased, villages and smaller towns deteriorated; demographic crisis of 1990s	By 1960 – under 25% of the pre-war population, very slow resettlement, state resettlement support, failed to restore pre-war population numbers
<i>Transformation of the settlement network</i>	
Settlement network remained 90% intact; traditional settlement patterns restored; industrialization and urbanization	Failed to restore the network of settlements. Frontier settlement pattern emerged, Bieszczady acquired an image as the Polish “Wild West”

Source: compiled by the authors

5. Discussion and conclusions

The USSR and Poland transferred to each other territories without their populations, so the most important issue for the two states in the new lands was to populate them, restoring the historic settlement network if possible. Both countries addressed this problem in various ways, given the geographical location of the territories, natural conditions and resources, demographic potential, previous experience of such actions and, in particular, the acceptable mechanisms and means of resettlement.

The USSR had much more opportunity to populate the acquired territory. It possessed significantly larger demographic resources, including former residents of Zabuże who had been displaced in Western Ukraine after the Polish–Ukrainian population exchange in 1944–1946. The territory of Zabuże had better conditions for agriculture. Besides, the USSR, planning to explore the coal deposits in the Lviv-Volyn Basin, intended a full-scale industrialization of a large region bordering with Poland that covered the north of Lviv and south-west of Volyn Oblast. Until 1939, on both territories (Zabuże and TAB) the vast majority of the population was of Ukrainians, which was also a positive factor for the USSR. After all, since the 1930s, the Soviet Union had gained enormous experience in “addressing” demographic issues through a variety of economic and political mechanisms.

Poland had far fewer opportunities to rapidly populate the acquired territory. The geographical location of the TAB was not very convenient – it was in the remote south-east of the country. The natural conditions of the foothills and the mountainous territories were much less conducive to intensive agriculture, and the development of sheep farming and forestry did not require a large amount of labor resources. In addition to that, the

Polish government also had yet to populate new territories in the south and north of the country.

There was a striking difference in the resettlement policies that Poland and the USSR applied to the TAB and Zabuzhzhia regions, respectively. In early years after the exchange, the Soviet government clearly restricted former Zabuzhzhia inhabitants recently displaced during the 1944–1946 Polish–Soviet population exchange from returning to the area. It was not until Stalin’s death that they received permission to return, and the whole process lasted until the mid-1960s. Restriction also applied to resettlers from the TAB. Except for railway workers and their families, who made up less than 1% of the 32,000 dwellers, the majority were displaced to the steppe regions in the south and east of Ukrainian SSR. Obviously, it would have made more sense to let those people move to Zabuzhzhia or to join their families in Prykarpattia, in a familiar natural and cultural environment. Poland did not impose any such restrictions. Up to 30% of the first resettlement wave to the Ustrzyki Dolne region were from Zabuzhzhia. It was rather a lack of quality housing that restricted the number of immigrants. Many people were allowed to move to their relatives in Hrubieszów and Tomaszów powiaty.

In our opinion, one may find the rationale behind the Soviet migration policies in the territorial control strategies practiced by the Communist regime and other totalitarian regimes of the early 20th century. There were two such strategies: complete displacement of the population from certain territories and its dispersal among various distant regions, and diffusing people, usually through industrialization projects.

The first strategy aimed at the complete replacement of a territory’s population (or at leaving it depopulated), allowing for full political control. This aside, this policy allowed for the creation of so-called “sanitary” or buffer borderlands physically separating communities or regions where contacts were undesirable.

The second strategy promoted the development of industrialized regions with mixed populations, which later became denationalization cores for the neighboring rural areas. With this strategy, the Soviet government exercised control over larger areas with prevailingly rural populations. Significant mineral resources were a necessary precondition for this approach.

In our opinion, these two territorial control strategies were an important reason behind the 1951 territory exchange. The Soviet government aimed to strengthen political control over the “insufficiently loyal” communities in western Ukraine. Therefore, this goal may have been even more important than the officially proclaimed economic one. Perhaps it was the reason behind the second stage of the exchange plan that was abandoned after Stalin’s death.

Comparing the exchanged territories, one may discover another important feature, namely their shape. Geographers are well aware of spatial shape as a factor of territory development. The shapes of Zabuzhzhia and Ustrzyki Dolne region are easily visible, yet they have not been paid sufficient attention in academic analysis. The territory acquired by Poland is rather compact, if slightly stretched from north to south. On the other hand, the territory of Zabuzhzhia stretches in a thin strip from west to east from Uhniv to Belz, and in a slightly wider strip from south to north towards Volyn oblast. The borderline in Zabuzhzhia is much longer, compared to that in the TAB. In soviet times, state borders were rather a limiting factor for local community development since they performed only a barrier function and borderland populations had multiple limitations. In addition to that, the Buh and Sokolia rivers cut Zabuzhzhia from the north, east and south.

Zabuzhzhia’s shape along with its being encircled by the state border and the rivers, contributed to the demographic deterioration of the area. By the mid-1960s, the government had repopulated a significantly bigger number of settlements in Zabuzhzhia as compared to the TAB. This was primarily due to the demands of the extensive Soviet agriculture. However, starting from the 1970s, depopulation trends worsened significantly in most of the villages, especially in the east and north of Zabuzhzhia. The old historic towns of Belz and Uhniv have now been in decline for decades. Uhniv even holds a sad record as the smallest town in Ukraine, with fewer than 1,000 citizens.

Further investigations of the 1951 exchange should shed more light on the history of the USSR’s geopolitics, and especially on energy policy as a

means of imposing dependence upon Moscow for resources among the former socialist bloc countries. Exploration of the Lviv Volyn coal basin was a stark example of this policy. The basin supplied power-generating plants in the west of Ukraine, which were part of the integrated socialist bloc countries’ electric power grid called “Mir” (in Russian, “Peace”).

The new geopolitical era, along with the recent military aggression against Ukraine, has catalyzed major changes in Ukrainian–Polish borderland policies towards intensive cooperation. Both presidents of Ukraine and Poland have developed a vision that the Polish–Ukrainian border should not remain a barrier designed during the Cold War (Duda, 2022; Zeleński, 2022). Accelerated cohesion between Ukraine and Poland at the bilateral level and between Ukraine and the EU on the multi-lateral basis opens an opportunity for effective transborder cooperation that will help to step beyond former grudges and imagined threats and unleash the potential of social and economic development of the regions exchanged in the 20th century.

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