

# Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis

Studia Geographica IX (2015)

ISSN 2084-5456

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## **Selected features of socio-demographic structure of a post-military town that emerged after the decommissioning of the Soviet Army's secret military base in Poland – the Borne Sulinowo example**

### **Abstract**

The goal of the paper was to present the selected socio-demographic features of Borne Sulinowo, a unique town in Poland, established within the area of the former secret military base of the Soviet Army and never used for non-military purposes before 1993. Borne Sulinowo is located in the north-west, approx. 20 kilometres from Szczecinek town. Before the World War II it had been a German garrison with the Wehrmacht Artillery School and after 1945 the area was taken over by the Soviet Army. The troops were present there until the end of 1992. Once the Soviet soldiers and officers have left the garrison, new Polish inhabitants started to come to Borne Sulinowo and develop the "new" town. That is why the socio-demographic structure of the town in its first 20 years (1993–2013) was peculiar, and so were the factors determining its transformation. The influence of the military past on the structure of Borne Sulinowo population has been shown in the paper. In 2013 the population of Borne Sulinowo consisted of approximately 4900 people; 60% of whom were between 18 and 59 years old. People under 18 made up 18% of the total population, whilst inhabitants over 60–22%. Because of the short Polish history of the town and the lack of traditions, Borne Sulinowo's citizens are not fully integrated. Most of them came from different regions of Poland, thus having various backgrounds and cultures.

**Key words:** closed cities; garrisons; military bases; post-military areas

### **Introduction**

Borne Sulinowo – a town in the West Pomeranian Voivodeship, reclaimed by Poland in 1993 after the Soviet Army left the unit – is a unique example of a settlement that had to deal with a number of issues related to adapting the post-military areas and facilities for civilian purposes. Spatial development problems were followed by social issues, associated with the influx of people from different backgrounds and social groups into the newly formed town.

The aim of the author was to present the socio-demographic structure of Borne Sulinowo, and show the influence of the military past on its shaping, as well as to capture the image of transformations that took place here in the period of 20 years of the town's existence (1993–2013). Additionally, the factors attracting people to settle in Borne Sulinowo were presented.

In order to study the subject, analyses of statistical data obtained from the Bank of Local Data of The National Statistical Office (GUS) were used, as well as data included in the planning and strategic documentation of the town (*Strategia rozwoju...*, 2003; *Strategia rozwoju...*, 2009). Furthermore, information gathered by the author during in-depth interviews with town residents and first settlers was utilised. In addition, a library query and analysis of press materials were made.

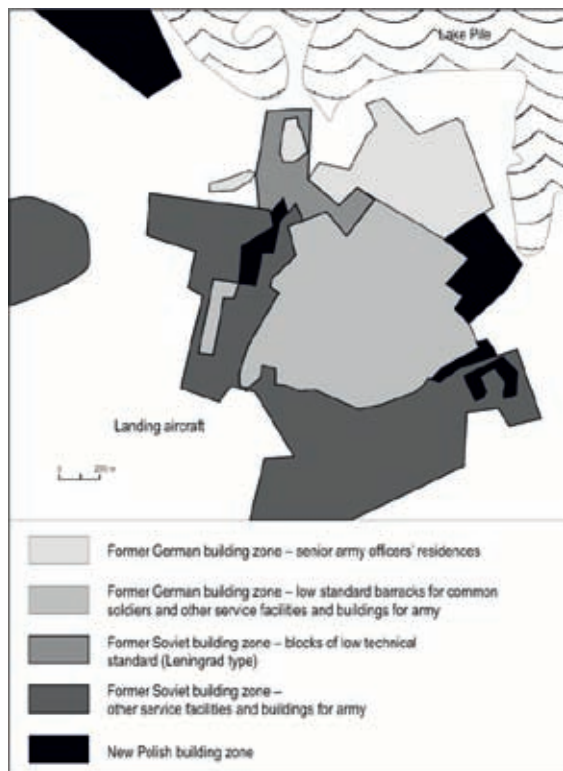
The first part of the article provides a short brief on the history of Borne Sulinowo. Particular attention was paid to the period of the Soviet Army stay in this area and the issues related to the soldiers leaving the base. Other problems highlighted were those resulting from the necessity to adapt a military infrastructure to civilian purposes. The next chapter presents selected features of the town's population and their transformation in the 1993–2013 period. In the last part of the paper the basic factors attracting new residents to settle in this town were identified.

### **The outline of the actual development of the town**

The area where the town of Borne Sulinowo is located was inhabited by the Pomeranians until the 15th century; later by German settlers, who established a town of Gross Born in 1587. The most significant moment of its history was the decision of the Third Reich to purchase said area, to relocate the local population, and to create there (in the years 1933–1939) a military base with a polygon and the artillery school of Wehrmacht (Małachowski, Szymańska 1995). Then, the area acquired a strictly military character, reflected in the urban layout (figure 1), characteristic to German military settlements (<http://www.bornesulinowo.pl>). Borne Sulinowo had a regular network of streets adapted to the function of buildings and facilities located in their vicinity. The north-eastern part was a place of residence of the senior army officers. It consisted of two-storey villas and high standard houses of similar sizes and shapes intended for officers. Next to them, there was an officer casino. The remaining buildings are two-storey barracks of lower standard and intended for common soldiers. In the town there were also many administrative and service facilities for the army, including diners, cinemas, casinos, shops, military hospital, and a complex of warehouses, granaries, laundries, garages, shooting ranges, and drill and training grounds. A railway line led to the city, and in the south-western part the landing ground for military aircraft was located. The town had its own source of water and a wastewater treatment plant (Pawlak 2012). During the World War II the POW camps also functioned within this area (Skowronek 2014).

In 1945 this post-German military base was taken over by the Soviet Army, which stationed here until 1992 (6th Soviet Guards Vitebsk-Novgorod Mechanised Division). In this period Borne Sulinowo was, alongside Świętoszowo, “the most important garrison from the point of view of the combat capability of the Soviet Army's ground forces in Poland” (Ostrowski, Szczepański 1992: 35). The Soviet Army exploited the existing post-German infrastructure and buildings, adjusting them to their own purposes and needs. The base was supplemented with 5-storey-high blocks of low technical standard (the so-called “leningrads”), located mainly on the present day Aleja Niepodległości (*Independence Avenue*) and Orła Białego Street (*the White Eagle Street*), as well as many warehousing and technical facilities, located

in the southern and western sections of the town. The garrison was self-sufficient, divided into sectors, in which the barracks were located, as well as the facilities of individual battalions.



**Fig. 1.** Schematic layout of the former German and Soviet building zones and the new Polish one at Borne Sulinowo

Source: Płoskoń 2014, changed

Soviets had their own diners, cinemas, guard-houses, warehouses and many other objects (Pawlak 2012). There were sectors, where educational and medical objects were located, as well as shops, service points, storerooms (including the storage of weapons and nuclear warheads). Additionally, there was an administration-residential sector, with hotels for senior officers. In contrast to the German Army's soldiers, the Soviet soldiers lived in garrisons together with their families.

During the stay of the Soviet Army, Borne Sulinowo was a closed town. It did not officially exist on any Polish map, and crossing its borders required a special permit. Three gates led into the town, and the entire area was guarded by armed guards (Poczta 2009). The number of Soviet soldiers at Borne Sulinowo remained unknown. It was also not known what they dealt with exactly. It is estimated that approx. 25,000 soldiers and members of their families lived within the town (Krogulski 2011).

Ceasing the military function of the town was related to the new international political situation and the disarmament policy, implemented since the late 1980s, under which the reduction and then the complete withdrawal of Soviet troops from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the German Democratic Republic was carried out. The fall of pro-soviet governments in the countries of the Warsaw Pact contributed to it, and so did the tearing down of the so-called Berlin Wall (Szymański 2009). Last Soviet soldiers left Borne Sulinowo on 5th October 1992. The town was passed first to the Polish military authorities and then to the civilian ones (Łazarewicz, Szt Tyler 1993).

Until 1993 the city was watched over by a division of approx. 400 Polish soldiers. After the official opening in June 1993 first settlers started to move in, taking care of adapting the area in order to accept new residents. On their departure, the Soviet troops did not leave behind any planning documents relating to buildings and the course of transmission lines. Most of the buildings were bound to be refurbished, due to their low technical state and typically military purpose (Gawryś 1996).

Therefore, the town was remade from scratch, and existing objects were adapted for civilian purposes. At first, Borne Sulinowo became a part of Silnowo municipality, and only later the decision was made to create a separate urban unit, which came into being officially on 15th September 1993 and eventually was to take in 10 thousand residents.

The current spatial and urban layout of the town is a combination of influences of the German and Soviet military architecture, transformed and adopted for Polish civilian purposes, and also supplemented with objects built after 1993. The vast majority of post-military objects in Borne Sulinowo were re-developed, although the abandoned buildings still exist there, not used and dilapidated. This situation applies not only to the warehouses and granaries, i.e. large sized buildings, but also to the residential ones (figure 2).

Among other post-military towns, Winsdorf and Bergen in Germany are the closest to Borne Sulinowo in terms of architecture and urban pattern (<http://www.bornesulinowo.pl>).



**Fig. 2.** Dilapidated residential dwellings and warehouses at Borne Sulinowo

Source: Płoskoń 2014

## Selected socio-demographic characteristics of Borne Sulinowo population

After the withdrawal of the last Soviet troops in October 1992, Polish soldiers took on the responsibility of securing the abandoned town against robbers. Later, the first settlers gradually started moving in, dealing with the inventory of the existing property, its refurbishment and adaptation for civilian purposes.

The actual populating of the town began in May 1993, and in January 1994 approx. 620 people were already registered there (Małachowski, Szymańska 1995).

During this initial period of the development of the town, the number of its residents grew rapidly. The largest rise in population was observed in 1994 (the number of residents increased by 252% as compared to the number in 1993). Such an intensive growth related to migration lasted until 1999. During said period, the number of population grew by approx. 20% annually. In the years 2000–2007 this rate decreased significantly, but still remained at the level of several percent. Since 2008 it has stabilised on the level of approx. 1% a year (table 1). As indicated by the records from 31st December 2013, Borne Sulinowo was inhabited by 4 905 people.

In the initial period of the town's existence the feminisation rate equalled only 86 women per 100 men (Małachowski, Szymańska, 1995), which is a normal occurrence, because in the initial period of establishing new settlements, men moved in first, and later they brought their families. The feminisation index increased steadily, to the level of 117 women per 100 men in the period of 2007–2009 and from 2010 onward remained almost constant: 111–113 women per 100 men.

**Tab. 1.** Changes in population number in Borne Sulinowo during the 1993-2013 period

Year	Total	Males	Females	Feminisation rate	Population growth (%)
1993	376	–	–	–	100
1994	1325	–	–	–	252
1995	1549	784	765	97	17
1996	1942	964	978	101	25
1997	2384	1161	1223	105	23
1998	2817	1384	1433	104	18
1999	3307	1582	1725	109	17
2000	3568	1705	1863	109	8
2001	3686	1766	1920	109	3
2002	3871	1832	2039	111	5
2003	3931	1866	2065	111	2
2004	4044	1918	2126	111	3
2005	4184	1973	2211	112	3
2006	4349	2030	2319	114	4
2007	4522	2082	2440	117	4
2008	4589	2117	2472	117	1
2009	4632	2134	2498	117	1
2010	4779	2265	2514	111	3
2011	4844	2306	2538	110	1
2012	4850	2292	2558	112	0
2013	4905	2303	2602	113	1

Source: Author's work based on the data obtained from GUS

In connection with the growing number of population with an unchanging area of the town (approx. 18.5 km<sup>2</sup>), density of population in the town constantly grew, to 258 people/km<sup>2</sup> in 2013.

Above-described changes in population number were most greatly influenced by migrations related to the repopulation of the “empty” and “new” town. Very high migration inflow rate and low outflow caused the net migration rate in 1995 to remain on a very high positive level of over 200‰ (table 2). In the subsequent years it decreased gradually to 11‰ in 2013, which compared to other small cities in Poland was a high value.

**Tab. 2.** Changes in net migration, natural increase and population growth rates at Borne Sulinowo during the 1993-2013 period, in ‰

Year	Migration inflow rate (‰)	Migration outflow rate (‰)	Net migration rate (‰)	Birth rate (‰)	Death rate (‰)	Natural increase/decrease rate (‰)	Population growth rate (‰)
1993	–	–	–	2.7	0.0	2.7	X
1994	–	–	–	19.6	1.5	18.1	X
1995	244.7	28.4	216.3	25.2	0.0	25.2	241.4
1996	198.8	27.3	171.5	21.6	0.5	21.1	192.6
1997	198.0	54.1	143.9	21.4	4.6	16.8	160.7
1998	127.4	33.7	93.7	21.3	5.3	16.0	109.7
1999	126.4	29.6	96.8	13.3	5.4	7.9	104.6
2000	106.8	34.5	72.3	10.4	7.0	3.4	75.7
2001	70.3	24.4	45.8	12.2	8.1	4.1	49.9
2002	60.4	23.0	37.5	11.4	8.3	3.1	40.6
2003	53.4	24.7	28.7	8.9	9.7	–0.8	28.0
2004	70.0	29.7	40.3	7.7	10.9	–3.2	37.1
2005	59.5	25.1	34.4	8.6	8.6	0.0	34.4
2006	71.1	28.7	42.3	9.7	13.6	–3.9	38.4
2007	81.2	36.3	44.9	6.2	8.6	–2.4	42.5
2008	49.5	22.4	27.0	9.2	12.0	–2.8	24.2
2009	37.3	24.6	12.7	6.5	11.9	–5.4	7.3
2010	36.0	22.6	13.4	7.3	11.7	–4.4	9.0
2011	34.3	17.5	16.7	7.8	11.1	–3.3	13.4
2012	27.0	22.5	4.5	6.8	9.7	–2.9	1.6
2013	32.8	22.0	10.8	8.2	9.2	–1.0	9.8

Source: Author’s work based on the data obtained from GUS

The research of Małachowski and Szymańska (1995) showed that these new settlers, who have come here from the entire Poland, differed in terms of their backgrounds and education level. Their motivations to come to Borne Sulinowo varied.

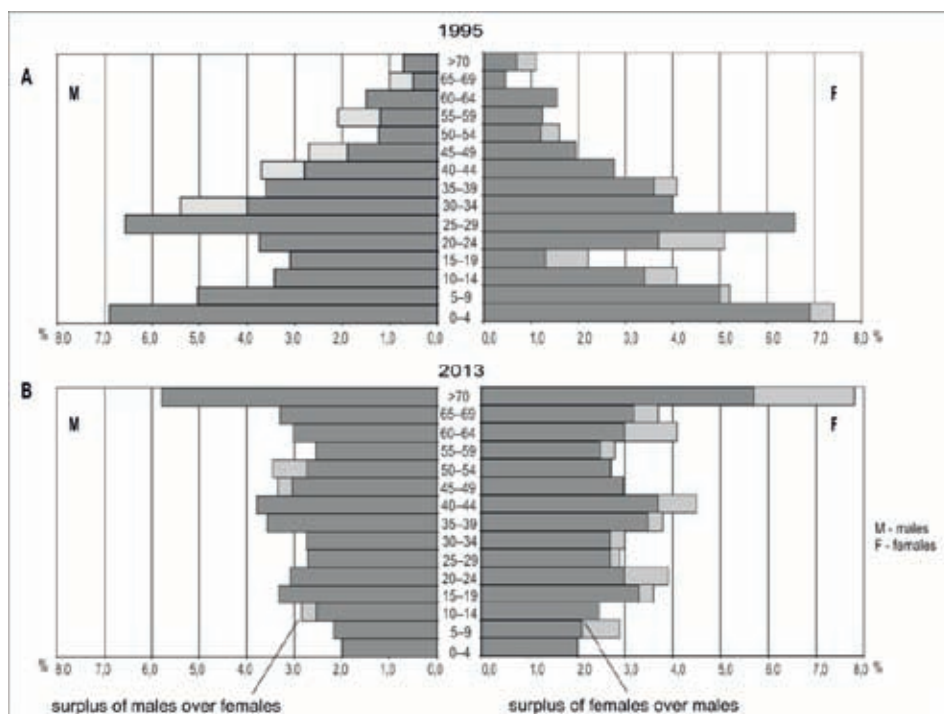
Positive birth rate (table 2) also contributed to the steady increase of population number. Birth rate in the years 1994–1998 was over 20‰. Even though since 1999 it has fallen as much as to 8‰ in 2013, the average value for this period was still high: approx. 12‰. On the other hand, the death rate which was very low in

the first years of the town's Polish history has regularly increased since 1997 – from 4.6‰ to 9.7‰ (a value figure noted since 2003) and its average was 7.5‰. This was related directly to the refurbishment of the former post-German hospital and locating the Nursing Home there (<http://www.dps.dpsborne.eu>), which caused an increase of elderly people number in the town.

Low death rate and high birth rate in the years 1994–1998 resulted in very high values of population growth rate which reached the value of 25‰; however, with the increase of death rate and the decrease of birth rate, they resulted in the average decrease of population noted for the first time in the town in 2003 (–0.8‰) and later since 2005.

This caused the decrease of the population growth rate, which reached its highest values in the years 1994–1998, and then steadily fell (table 2). However, due to positive migration balance, this growth was still observed and amounted to 9.8‰ in 2013, which is a positive signal for the town's future.

Considering the changes of the socio-demographic structure of the population of Borne Sulinowo, the author has also paid attention to the differences in age and sex structure of population in 1995 and 2013 (figure 3). In 1995 the pyramid (figure 3 – A) was typical for the phase of the establishing of a town – the influx of people of a working age with small children could have been noticed. Women and men between

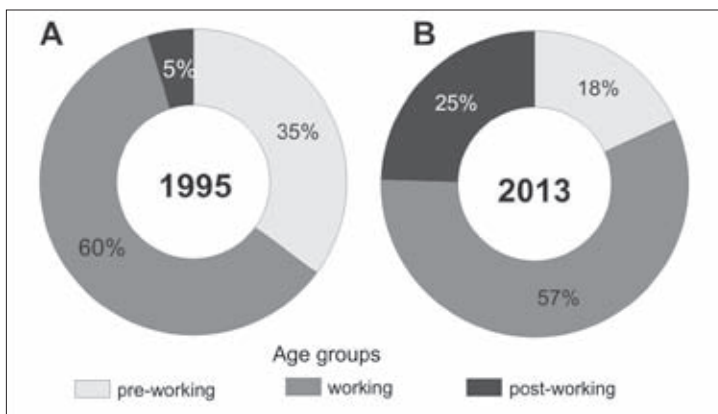


**Fig. 3.** Age and sex structure of Borne Sulinowo population in 1995 (A) and 2013 (B)

Source: Author's work based on the data obtained from GUS; Płoskoń 2014

25 and 29 years old constituted the biggest share, with those of old age accounting for a relatively small one. In 1995 60% of total population was of a working age (figure 4). Whilst in 2013 not much changed in this scope, the percentage of people of the pre-working age dropped significantly: from 35% to 18%, whilst the participation of people at the post-working age increased five times: from 5% to 25%. Analysing the pyramid of gender and age of the population in 2013 (figure 3-B), we notice the predominance of the elderly, especially those over 70 years old, and a clear dominance in the number of women over the number of men in this age range, which is directly connected to the higher life expectancy of women.

Such a shape of the pyramid in 2013 is a result of the process of aging of the population of Borne Sulinowo, lower value of birth rate and increased number of elderly people due to the presence of the above-mentioned Nursing Home.



**Fig. 4.** Population of Borne Sulinowo by economic age groups in 1995 (A) and 2013 (B)

Source: Author's work based the data obtained from GUS

On the other hand, in the structure of education of the Borne Sulinowo population (table 3), we notice the predominance of people with secondary and vocational education – 42%. People with higher education, however, constitute 10%.

**Tab. 3.** Structure of education of Borne Sulinowo population in 2002

Education level	Males		Females		Total	
	person	%	person	%	person	%
higher	150	10.9	148	9.6	298	10.2
secondary (post-secondary, vocational, secondary and general)	510	37.0	710	45.9	1120	41.7
basic vocational	426	30.9	262	16.9	688	23.5
basic completed	272	19.6	381	24.6	653	22.3
basic incomplete and those without any education	22	1.6	46	3.0	68	2.3
Total	1380	100.0	1547	100.0	2927	100.0

Source: Author's work based on the data obtained from GUS



## Main factors attracting new residents to Borne Sulinowo

One of the main reasons for settling in Borne Sulinowo (especially important in the first period of the town's existence) was the availability of apartments and houses at a very low price, in comparison with other towns in Poland (Biały 1993), as shown by the survey carried out in the end of 1993 by Małachowski and Szymańska (1995). Some of the flats in Borne Sulinowo were given away for free to people entitled to compensations for the so-called Bug River claims (property left in the pre-war eastern Poland, taken by USSR in 1939).

Ecological conditions were also important. Borne Sulinowo is attractive due to its location amongst forests and close to the picturesque lake Pile, with its quietness, peacefulness and clean air. It was an ideal place for families with small children and retirees seeking peace and quiet. In fact, the town was advertised in many cities in such a way. This was particularly true when it came to portraying Borne Sulinowo within the Upper Silesian Industrial District as a complete opposite to said part of Poland. The promotional campaign was carried out on a large scale in many places. The "new" town, reinvented from scratch for civilian purposes was also attractive for those, who, for various reasons, were not successful in life and wanted to "start over" at Borne Sulinowo.

During the first years of its existence, the town encouraged to settle also through the promises of employment – it needed hands to work on refurbishing the buildings and redecorating the town. People of all professions were in demand: shops and other service and administration facilities, as well as schools and the above-mentioned Nursing Home were still being created.

With the increase of population number, the prospect of new jobs was gradually exhausted. Currently, the unemployment rate begins to grow. The latest newcomers have to look for work outside of Borne Sulinowo, for example in Szczecinek, or they, especially the young, began to leave Borne Sulinowo.

## Summary

Borne Sulinowo is an interesting example of a post-military town that has never in its past served civilian functions. It was created as a military base and it kept this function for approx. 60 years, when German and Soviet soldiers stationed here. The former have created the spatial layout of the town and determined the character of buildings; the latter supplemented the settlement and adapted it for their own purposes. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Army, the town was an abandoned garrison, with full and complete infrastructure, but requiring renovation and adaptation for new civilian purposes.

New residents had to re-arrange everything. Due to the town's short history, they were neither a coherent nor an integrated social group. Lack of duty, tradition and attachment to the area also contribute to this fact. They came from the whole of Poland and from varied social groups. Some of the main reasons for settling at Borne Sulinowo were very low prices of flats, peaceful surroundings and clean air.

The main problem, with which Borne Sulinowo currently needs to deal, is a high unemployment rate and the lack of perspectives for young people. The local population is aging, even though the birth rate is still high, mainly due to positive migration net.

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