

## Article

# Manor and Park Estates—Resilience to Transformation and the New Management of Space Due to Political Changes: The Case of Western Pomerania (Poland)

Magdalena Rzeszotarska-Pałka 

Department of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Environmental Management and Agriculture,  
West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin, J. Słowackiego 17, 71-434 Szczecin, Poland;  
mrzeszotarskapalka@zut.edu.pl

**Abstract:** The historical landscape reveals diverse social, economic, political transformations that create an identity of place, one which should be protected for future generations. Manor and park estates have been and continue to be valuable parts of cultural heritage and a distinguishing feature of the rural landscape in Europe. Since 1945, however, they have often failed to resist negative changes, especially in Eastern Europe where, after the Second World War, countries adopted the socialist system, which abolished private property and placed many historical buildings under the management of state institutions for several decades. In this context, it is important to study their current state of preservation. This study analyzes the condition of manor and park estates in Western Pomerania, Poland, that became the property of State Agricultural Farms (PGRs) after the Second World War. For this purpose, it was necessary to determine the extent of their transformation brought about by the State Agricultural Farms from 1949–1991, as well as changes that have occurred in the past 30 years. A qualitative method was used to assess the preservation of historical manor and park estates and to classify them according to their degree of preservation. The results showed that 42% of the estates surveyed have had their original form and spatial composition transformed, and their preservation status is assessed as moderate. Nearly 30% are in poor condition, which is hindering their full revitalization and the restoration of cultural and natural values. Only 28% of manor and park estates are maintained in a very good state. It is a matter of concern that the decline of these estates has been continuous and that restoration efforts have been limited. However, by assessing the current state of preservation, we can identify the measures necessary to stop further deterioration and preserve the cultural heritage of the region. It is clear that the preservation of these estates is essential to maintaining the identity of Western Pomerania. Manor and park estates are historical monuments associated with the people who once lived there. They must be protected to promote sustainable development and preserve a common European cultural heritage for future generations.



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## 1. Introduction

The evolving political, economic, and social landscapes present both opportunities and threats to the preservation of natural and cultural heritage. Halting the decay of historically significant buildings is crucial for revitalizing regional cultural identity and advancing the EU-wide vision of sustainable rural development in Western Pomerania. This study aligns with Goal 11 of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, focusing on creating inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities and human settlements. Section 11.4 of Goal 11 emphasizes the importance of research in protecting the world's cultural and natural heritage (Goal 11, Section 11.4. Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage), which underscores the need for a socio-economic and integrated approach to sustainable development.



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Examining the impact of post-war population displacement on cultural sustainability sheds light on how migrants were compelled to forsake their traditions, national identity, and culture due to external influences. By exploring this dynamic, the study aims to bolster sustainable rural development in Western Pomerania. The assessment of manor and park estates, coupled with an analysis of institutional changes affecting the cultural landscape, holds both practical and theoretical significance for furthering sustainable development efforts in the region.

The European Landscape Convention clearly defines landscape as a vital part of cultural heritage that evolves over time due to both natural and human-related factors [1]. The historical landscape reflects diverse social, economic, and political transformations that have shaped an identity of place, which must be safeguarded for future generations [2–5]. Is the historic cultural landscape resilient to adverse transformation associated with changes in spatial management resulting from political changes? Are valuable components of cultural heritage transformed by the introduction of economic and spatial planning reforms with a change in political regime? Can the total replacement of a population in a given area after a war affect the use of historical buildings and have a negative impact on their preservation? Such questions are particularly pertinent for Eastern Europe, including Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, the eastern part of Germany, Bulgaria, and Romania where, after the Second World War, the socialist system was imposed on them, which resulted in the abolition of private property and the placement of many historical buildings under the management of state institutions for several decades (e.g., rural Poland and state-owned farms) [6]. At the same time, the forced resettlement of the population in certain areas led to the introduction of new users from different cultures, who often held a negative attitude towards the existing cultural heritage. This was particularly evident in areas that had been German for hundreds of years but became part of Poland in 1945 as a result of the Potsdam Conference. These include Western Pomerania, Gdańsk Pomerania, Lower Silesia, and Warmia–Masuria. To determine whether valuable elements of the historic landscape have resisted change, it is necessary to examine their current preservation status and to determine the degree of their transformation by the state over several decades [7].

Despite the regime changes that took place in Eastern Europe in the 1990s, such a diagnosis has yet to cover many valuable historical monuments. Only a full assessment of their preservation status can help to recognize the scale of deterioration and determine directions for their revitalization to preserve the most valuable sites [8]. Examples include historical manor and park estates which comprise cultural heritage in many rural areas in Poland and other European countries [6,9,10]. These sites should be legally protected in accordance with the Venice and Florence Charters [11,12], and national heritage protection systems (in Poland, the Act of 23 July 2003 on the protection and maintenance of historical monuments, and listing in the register of historical monuments) [13]. A number of researchers have demonstrated the significant role played by manor and park estates in environmental conservation [14–16], social and landscape values [17], or regional tradition [10,15]. Manor and park estates have great potential for developing local tourism products [14,18] and positively impacting the quality of life for people in rural areas [19].

Whether it comprises a manor house and park or a stately home and park, an estate is a grand spatial composition. It consists of complex interconnected elements, such as a manor house or a stately home with access to a road, park, functional gardens, and a fence with a gate [20–22]. Through extensive research, historians have produced monographs on the history and unique characteristics of individual estates or entire regions. These include excellent papers by Polish researchers, such as Ciołek, Bogdanowski, Majdecki, and Michałowski [23–27], and foreign scholars, such as Turner, Hobbhouse, Jellicoe, Good, and Thacker [9,28–30]. Additionally, there are valuable comparative studies on the preservation status of manor houses and manor parks in Eastern Europe, particularly in Hungary, Romania, Estonia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Czechia, and Russia [15,31–40].

As discussed above, Western Pomerania has undergone political and economic changes. The rural landscape in the region is characterized by the manor and park estate [41]. Catalogs such as those by Lemke, Bronisch and Ohle, Berghaus, and Brugemann [42–45] provide information about rural areas and the condition of various historical buildings in region before the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war, Bogdanowski conducted a comprehensive study on the Western Pomeranian landscape, and there are further noteworthy contributions by German authors, including Dorgerloh and Neuschaffer [46–48].

Although more than 70 years have passed, a comprehensive and up-to-date study of historic manor and park estates in the Western Pomerania area has yet to be conducted. However, there have been several smaller studies, including descriptions of manor parks by Sienicka and Kownas in 1963 [49] and analyses of selected manor and park estates by Latour and Łukasiewicz, Rutyna, and Szulc in the 1980s and 1990s [50–53] and since 2000 by Łuczak and Walkiewicz [54,55]. The history and transformation of selected rural parks during the PGR period was described by Żarkowska [56,57] in the 1980s and by Rzeszotarska since 2000 [58–60]. Recent research focusing on the current status of manor houses and parks in rural areas of Western Pomerania has been lacking. However, valuable comparative information can be obtained from research conducted on northern and western Poland, which also belonged to Germany before the war, for instance on East Prussia [61], Silesia [62–64], Lower Silesia [65,66], and Warmia–Masuria [7,67,68]. The research mainly discussed the historical structure of the sites, whereas Łaguna [7,68] attempted to develop a method for assessing the status of villages managed by state institutions. Additionally, photographic albums showcasing selected sites [60,69,70] were published for the Vorpommern region, a part of Western Pomerania now inside the German border. Issues pertaining to the revalorization of manor and park estates in central and eastern Poland have been examined by such researchers as Michalak, Raszeja, Wycichowska, Balińska, Sikora, Rosłoń, Milecka, and Hodor [65,71–78]. A very important publication that provided a detailed description of revalorization methods applicable to historical parks managed by the state is the *Model postępowania konserwatorskiego dla zdewastowanych założeń ogrodowych przejętych przez AWRSP* (The Model of Conservation for Devastated Garden Estates Taken Over by the Agricultural Property Agency AWRSP) [8]. Paszkowski highlights the urgent need for further research into the causes and effects of the negative transformation of manor and park estates in Western Pomerania following World War II [79]. He emphasizes that some buildings have been completely destroyed and others are in a state of further dilapidation. He points out that other researchers have also expressed concerns that a similar process is taking place in other regions of Poland [80–82].

## 2. Research Objectives and Materials

### 2.1. The Context of the Case Study—Manor and Park Estates in Western Pomerania

Western Pomerania is a geographical and historical region that encompasses land bordering the Baltic Sea, stretching from the area east of Lębork to the west of Stralsund. Its southern border is defined by the broad glacial valley of the Noteć and Warta rivers [53]. Over the centuries, this region has been a crossroads for the interests of Poland, Brandenburg, the Teutonic State, Mecklenburg, Sweden, Denmark and the German Empire. From the 17th century onwards, the region was under the rule of Brandenburg (Germany), but after the Second World War, the eastern part of Western Pomerania (Hinterpommern) became Polish. The German population was expelled and new settlers came in from the Polish hinterland, including Borderland Poles, or Kresovians. Meanwhile, the western part of the region (Vorpommern) became part of the GDR (East Germany). The core study area focuses on Hinterpommern, a part of Western Pomerania which was incorporated into the Polish state after the Second World War (Figure 1).

The traditional rural landscape of Western Pomerania is characterized by large-scale farming and a specific form of landed estates. These estates were based on a medieval spatial arrangement of villages, where manor houses and associated parks served as spatial landmarks [83]. The characteristic style of historical manor and park estates was

finally shaped in the 19th century, with major composition features of manors and stately homes built or rebuilt to revive historical styles, including neo-Renaissance, neo-Baroque, neo-Gothic, neo-classicism, and eclecticism. To complement these architectural wonders, landscaped parks were either created or modernized.



**Figure 1.** The area of Western Pomerania after the Second World War (in white) and the Polish–German border (in pink) (source: <https://grosstuchen.de/Pommernach45.html>, accessed on 22 January 2024).

Manor parks were established in nearly every second village and became one of the most important elements of the rural landscape in Western Pomerania. The abundance of manor parks has been noted by several researchers, including Latour and Łukasiewicz, and Nekanda [50,83]. Nekanda wrote: “In Western Pomerania, a village with a manor and park estate became the most popular arrangement. After the war, the estates were taken over by State Agricultural Farms (PGRs)” [83] (p. 36).

After the Second World War, as a result of the political and economic changes and a new rural development strategy adopted in 1949, manor houses and parks became the property of State Agricultural Farms (PGRs). According to the Manifesto by the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) and a decree on agricultural reform (Decree of the PKWN on the Agricultural Regime and Settlement in the Recovered Western and Northern Territories, adopted on 6 September 1944), all landed properties exceeding 50 ha of agricultural land were to become the property of the state. Historical manor houses and manor and park estates were also taken over by the state. In 1949, state farms known as PGRs were established in these areas [84] and operated until 1991. After the political system in Poland changed in 1989, the country successfully transitioned from a socialist to capitalist economy, introducing private property ownership. This entailed changes in the management of land previously operated by the PGRs. The Agricultural Property Agency (AWRSP) was established in accordance with the Act of 19 October 1991 on the management of agricultural property of the State Treasury and amendments to certain acts [85]. The AWRSP sold or leased land and facilities taken over from the State Agricultural Farms. The legal successor of the AWRSP is now the National Support Center for Agriculture (KOWR). The KOWR is currently supervising the transition process involving manor and park estates, and has already sold and leased some estates.

Prior to the 1960s, the PGR system closely aligned with the network of former landed estates. However, more intensive investment in the PGRs had a negative impact on the historical spatial structure of manor and park estates [59].

## 2.2. Research Scope and Objectives

Due to the political changes that took place in Eastern Europe after 1945, new settlers from Central and Eastern Poland moved into the so-called Recovered Territories in Poland (Western Pomerania, Lower Silesia, Warmia, and Masuria). The newcomers represented different cultures and used different methods of land management. Additionally, changes in the character of agricultural production in the post-war period, the introduction of the socialist economic model, and the nationalization of estates previously owned by the nobility led to unfavorable changes in the historical structure of manor farms and estates. Many historical buildings were left in a state of disrepair.

Later, the economic changes after 1989 abolished the state agricultural sector together with the PGRs and reinstated private ownership. The manor and park estates were transferred to the Agricultural Property Agency answerable to the State Treasury (AWRSP). The Agency took over the property and distributed the assets of the State Agricultural Farms among private owners and state institutions. However, despite the efforts made in the last 30 years, many manor and park estates remain unrestored. In this context, it is important to study their current state of preservation and the destructive impact of the large State Agricultural Farms that were abolished by the Act of 19 October 1991, on the management of State Treasury agricultural property. However, manor and park estates are still extremely valuable elements of the cultural rural heritage in Western Pomerania, and since they contribute to the identity of the region, they must be preserved for future generations [6]. The aim of this study is to provide a detailed analysis of the condition of selected manor and park estates in Western Pomerania. To achieve this, it is necessary to determine the extent of their transformation brought about by the State Agricultural Farms between 1949 and 1991, as well as changes that have occurred in the past 30 years.

## 2.3. Subject of the Study

This research focuses on manor and park estates in Western Pomerania that were taken over by State Agricultural Farms (PGRs) after the Second World War. The analysis covers 46 selected sites that are considered representative of the area and for which comprehensive source materials are available. The research covers the period of State Agricultural Farm operation from 1949 until 1991 and the period from 1991 until 2023. During the later period, the manor and park estates either remained unused or were taken over by new owners.

## 3. Research Methods

This research was conducted using the inductive method, which involves collating historical written, iconographic, and cartographic materials with site observations made during local visits. The research covers selected manor and park estates for which historical materials were available in the archives of the Provincial Conservation Service, Regional Center for Historical Monument Research and Documentation, and the State Archive in Szczecin. Field visits were organized three times in 2004, 2016, and 2023. The assessment covers two main areas: the causes of degradation during PGR operation on the estates, and the preservation status of manor houses, historical parks, and tall greenery. To achieve this, this research uses the JARK-WAK analysis, a method developed by Bogdanowski from the Kraków school of landscape architecture [25] as well as a method presented in the author's doctoral thesis [86].

The scope of the study includes the following:

- an analysis of the transformation during the operation of State Agricultural Farms (PGRs);
- criteria for classifying manor and park estates based on their preservation status;
- the status of selected manor and park estates.

A qualitative method is used to assess the preservation of historical manor and park estates. The assessment is based on two factors:

1. Preservation degree of the manor house (Table 1). Determines how well the historical building (manor house or stately home) has been maintained, with particular attention paid to original elements supporting its historical value.
  - Very good—A building in good or very good technical condition, with well-preserved historical and artistic values. The building has been renovated to maintain its authentic character or to restore its original condition.
  - Moderate—A building in an average technical condition, with partially preserved historical and artistic values. It is still possible to renovate it to preserve its original historical values, with sufficient preservation of its original structure. The building has been subject to minor alterations.
  - Poor—A building in a poor technical condition; little preserved historical value. The deterioration of the building makes it very difficult or impossible to restore its functions while preserving its historical and artistic values. The building has undergone significant alterations.
  - Ruin—A building is technically ruined; its historical value can no longer be preserved. Only minor parts of the building still remain. The deterioration of the building does not allow for restoration of its functions and preservation of its historical and artistic values.
  - No longer exists—A building does not exist; no traces of the building remain.
2. Preservation of the park composition (Table 2). Discernibility of historical composition is a criterion that determines the preservation of the layout and historical elements of the park. The assessment includes the clarity and preservation of the original layout with park internal spaces, avenues, paths, and clearings, the visibility of main and side axes, focal points, and openings, etc. The assessment also covers the preservation of historical elements, such as small architecture, artefacts, water systems (artificial ponds, streams, and fountains), terrain stairs, bridges, gates and fencing, etc.
  - Preserved—Clear historical composition (main composition elements preserved, discernible system of paths); preserved all or most elements of small architecture, discernible water system, preserved historical fence, etc.
  - Clearly reconstructed—A historical layout reconstructed based on available source documents; reconstructed or preserved small architecture, fencing, etc.
  - Partially discernible—A partially preserved historical layout (e.g., main compositional axes, paths preserved—usually near manor house), with partly altered or obliterated layout (mainly on park outskirts, sometimes also near manor house); few elements of small architecture and/or fencing preserved, water system transformed or incomplete, etc.
  - Partially reconstructed—A historical character of the park has been restored. Historical layout partly reconstructed (e.g., main composition axes, paths arrangement partly preserved—usually near manor house), composition partly altered or obliterated; only selected elements of landscaping and/or fencing reconstructed, water system transformed and discernible, etc.
  - Obscured—A historical composition completely obscured, most often due to uncontrolled growth of tall and medium-size vegetation or introduction of alien species (obliterated main composition, view axes, overgrown clearings and paths); deteriorated small architecture, obscured water system, lack of historical fencing, etc.
3. Preservation of tall greenery (Table 2). The assessment is based on comparison of source materials and current status of the park.
  - Very good—Tall greenery very well preserved, most old trees remain (avenues, solitary trees preserved), vegetation well-maintained.
  - Moderate—Tall greenery well preserved, partially preserved old trees (avenues with minor loss of trees, few solitary trees and tree clusters), vegetation partly taken care of.

- Poor—Tall historic greenery in poor or moderate condition, old trees partly preserved (avenues almost completely obscured, few or no solitary trees, etc.), lack of maintenance and no new plantings for a long time.

**Table 1.** Assessment criteria for manor houses.

Preservation of Stately Home or Manor House	Number of Points
Very good	3
Moderate	2
Poor	1
Ruin/No longer exists	0

**Table 2.** Assessment criteria for parks.

Preservation of Park	Park Layout	Preservation of Park Greenery	Number of Points
Very good	Preserved, clearly reconstructed	Very good	3
	Partially reconstructed	Very good	
Moderate	Partially discernable, partially reconstructed	Moderate, poor	2
Poor	Obscured	Moderate, poor	1
No park	None—No longer exists	None—No longer exists	0

The total number of points assigned helps to classify the manor and park estates according to their degree of preservation. Three levels of preservation are distinguished: very good, moderate, and poor (Table 3).

- Very good—The entire manor and park estate preserved in a very good or good condition. Preserved historical and artistic values. Facilities well maintained and renovated to preserve their original character, or restored to their original condition.
- Moderate—A manor and park estate preserved in good or moderate state. Partially preserved historical and artistic values, moderate transformation of the original layout or only selected elements of the layout (park or manor), restoration possible.
- Poor—A manor and park estate deteriorated; historical and artistic values partially discernible, only selected elements still remain (park or manor). Major transformation of the original layout makes it impossible to restore the historical value.

**Table 3.** Preservation of the manor and park estate.

Total Points	Preservation of Manor and Park Estate
6–5	Very good
4–3	Moderate
2–0	Poor

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Transformation due to the Operation of State Agricultural Farms (PGRs)

#### 4.1.1. Transformation of Manor Houses and Stately Homes during the Operation of PGRs

Few manor houses and stately homes taken over after 1945 by the PGRs maintained their original residential function. Only three of the houses analyzed were entirely used as housing for PGR employees (Unimie, Wirówek, Wiesiółka). The vast majority of the

buildings served both residential and administrative purposes, with some rooms used as office space, common areas, and canteens (Bolkowice, Darskowo, Dębogóra, Dobropole, Glinna, Karnice, Kąkolewice, Kraśnik Koszal., Krzymów, Kulice, Laski Koszal., Lekowo, Lesięcin, Lubiechowo, Karkowo, Kozia Góra, Margowo, Sienno Dolne, Skarbimierzyce, Sokoliniec, Trzyglów, Unin, Wierzbęcin). In addition to residential and office functions, some buildings were used as warehouses (Krasne, Mechowo) and an egg hatchery (Leśno Górne). A small cinema operated in the stately home in Samlino until the 1970s, while Wicimice had a hostel for single women. Estates located in attractive tourist destinations, e.g., by lakes and along the coastal strip, were also used as leisure facilities, hotels, and holiday camp sites for children (Koszewo, Maciejewo, Siemczyno, Stuchowo). A separate group consisted of houses which for a certain period were used in whole or in part as schools, kindergartens, orphanages, and social care homes (Maciejewo, Modlimowo, Mosty, Sienno Dolne, Stuchowo, Czernikowo, Wicimice, Parsowo).

The adaptation to new functions often required major intervention in both the interior and exterior of the building. The development of several independent units within a single house brought irreversible changes to the interior. Large rooms were divided into smaller ones which destroyed the original interior design, including stuccowork, wall paintings, and paneling, as well as furnishings such as fireplaces and tiled cookers (Dębogóra, Dreżewo, Karnice, Kładno, Krasne, Mosty, Skarbimierzyce, Trzyglów, Unimie, Unin, Wirówek). When adapting premises for new functions, window openings were often changed and architectural details in window frames removed (Dębogóra, Karnice, Krasne, Lekowo, Wirówek). This completely changed the layout of the facades. Moreover, the process also involved sometimes partial or complete demolition of buildings (Dreżewo, Kraśnik Koszal., Modlimowo, Samlino) (Figure 2a,b).



(a)



(b)

**Figure 2.** (a) Manor house in Dębogóra, 2016. (b) Ruin of manor house in Kąkolewice, 2016 (source author).

Inadequate building repairs brought further unfavorable changes, such as the replacement of ceramic roof tiles with fiber cement (Eternit) or tar paper (Bolkowice, Budzistowo, Karnice, Krasne, Laski Koszal., Lekowo, Mosty, Przelewice, Skarbimierzyce, Unimie, Wiesiółka), plastering over half-timbered facades (Dobropole, Sienno Dolne), and removing gutters and downpipes, leading to the destruction of external and internal plaster and sometimes the deterioration of foundations. As the research has shown, from 1949 to 1989, many of the buildings went unmaintained, resulting in their technical status becoming disastrous. Only a few houses underwent proper comprehensive renovation (Bielin, Darskowo, Krzymów, Maciejewo, Mechowo) (Figure 3a,b).





(a)



(b)

**Figure 3.** (a) Manor house in Maciejewo, 2016. (b) Manor house in Lesiecin, 2004 (source: author).

However, the most significant decline in the historic structures can be found in sites that remained unused for extended periods. This group is extensive and includes 28 manor houses and stately homes, typically of high architectural value. The majority are listed in the Provincial Conservation Register. These buildings can be divided into two groups: those abandoned during the operation of the PGRs, mainly in the 1970s and 1980s, and those deprived of their users as a result of the collapse of State Agricultural Farms in the early 1990s.

In 2004, sixteen manor houses that had been abandoned in the 1970s and 1980s had poor technical status (Dębogóra, Kąkolewice, Karkowo, Kozia Góra, Krasne, Lubiechowo, Lubogoszcz, Lesiecin, Leśno Górne, Mechowo, Przelewice, Siemczyno, Sokoliniec, Świerzno, Trzygłów, Wicimice, Wierzbięcin). Three stately homes in the same group (Leśno Górne, Przelewice, Siemczyno) were renovated by their new owners after 2005.

In the aftermath of the collapse of the state agricultural sector, some manors and stately homes lost their users in the early 1990s. Twelve buildings (Bolkowice, Czerników, Dobropole, Dreżewo, Glinna, Kładno, Krzymów, Laski Koszal., Samlino, Sienno Dolne, Unin, Wiesiółka) were abandoned and gradually fell into disrepair. The stately home located in Samlino was demolished in 1999, and its bricks were used to build a church in the village. Fortunately, the stately home in Glinna was acquired by an agricultural company and underwent extensive renovation after 2014 (Figure 4a,b).



(a)



(b)

**Figure 4.** (a) Manor house in Glinna, 2004. (b) Manor house in Glinna, 2023 (source: author).

#### 4.1.2. The Current Status of Preservation of Manor Houses

Based on the field survey, eight buildings have remained unused for about 20–30 years and are in a poor condition, but restoration is still possible. Seven buildings, abandoned in the 1970s and 1980s, have gradually fallen into ruin and are no longer suitable for restoration. Two houses were demolished during the operation of the PGRs.

Fifteen manor houses and stately homes are in a moderate state of repair. Some are in need of urgent major renovation, whereas the renovation of others is underway. This group includes both inhabited and uninhabited buildings, the latter which have not been used since the collapse of the PGRs. Only fourteen manor houses have maintained their good or very good status. These buildings typically have new owners who have already renovated and adapted them for their new functions, often as hotels or residences.

#### 4.1.3. Transformation of the Parks during the PGR Period

During the PGR period (1949–1991), the manor parks were mainly used for recreation by the local population. However, when the manor house was repurposed as accommodation for PGR employees, the historic park was transformed into vegetable gardens and utility buildings, such as pigsties, barns, and sheds. These vegetable gardens and sheds often replaced former clearings or ornamental flowerbeds next to the manor house elevation overlooking the garden. This destroyed the most important part of the estate's historic composition (Karnice, Kąkolewice, Kraśnik Koszal., Margowo, Dobropole, Leśno Górne, Modlimowo, Samlino).

Additionally, children's playgrounds (Kładno, Małkocin) and school gardens (Modlimowo, Mosty, Stuchowo) were also created in the same locations. Sport fields were sometimes placed in close proximity to the garden-side elevation or directly on clearings (Czernikowo, Sienno Dolne, Stuchowo, Koszewo, Maciejewo, Modlimowo, Mosty, Trzygłów). This destroyed key elements of the historical composition.

Campsites, service pavilions, tarmacked car parks, and roads (Koszewo, Maciejewo, Trzygłów) were created next to those manor houses which had a leisure function. This obliterated the original composition of the manor park. Technical infrastructure was also located in the park area, including hydropower plants near the manor house (Karnice, Krasne, Siemczyno, Samlino, Wirówek), while high voltage and telephone lines pass through the park area (Mosty, Unimie).

However, the most significant changes to the composition of the entire historical park were caused by the addition of new buildings such as garages, workshops, warehouses (Krasne, Lubogoszcz, Siemczyno, Margowo, Modlimowo, Unimie, Wierzbiczin, Wiesiołka, Wirówek), fire stations, and complexes of residential buildings (Lubogoszcz, Mechowo). The inclusion of sub-standard buildings, such as wooden sheds and pigsties, further contributed to the park's decline (Figure 5a,b).



(a)



(b)

**Figure 5.** (a) Park in Kraśnik Koszaliński, 2004. (b) Park in Lesięcin, 2016 (source: author).

The condition of the greenery in the parks is poor and deteriorating. The parks contain self-seeded trees that are 70 years old. Although most of the old trees are preserved, their condition is rather poor due to a lack of professional dendrological care.

In the majority of the parks, uncontrolled growth of shrubs and undergrowth has occurred, thus obscuring the composition arrangement. At some sites, the proliferation of invasive species has rendered the parks practically impassable. Many historical gardens, abandoned in the 1970s and 1980s, remain neglected. This group also includes parks that lost their users due to the dissolution of the PGRs after 1991. The condition of the historical greenery in these areas is satisfactory, but the proliferation of self-sown plants is advancing. Valuable tree stands had already been felled by 1970 in Skarbimierzyce and Karków, and old oaks were removed in Dobropole. Moreover, further damage to trunks and roots, resulting in the death of trees, was caused by the regular passage of cattle through the park area to nearby meadows (Bielin, Karkowo, Lubiechowo, Margowo, Mosty, Karkowo, Samlino).

The condition of historical water systems is extremely poor. Ponds have silted up, become swampy, and their banks are overgrown (Dobropole, Mosty, Skarbimierzyce, Sokoliniec, Unimie, Kozia Góra). In fact, the parks analyzed do not contain any surviving historical garden buildings or small architectural features. Some of the remaining gardens have only ice houses, mostly hidden under dense vegetation. Many parks were used as cemeteries by the estate owners. Unfortunately, after the Second World War, ornamental gravestones became easy targets for thieves. Surviving gravestones were deliberately destroyed by new settlers (Stuchowo). The only cemeteries to survive were those located near a church or a chapel (Parsowo, Krzymów). In many instances, the original stone or brick fences surrounding the parks have been demolished, with only a few surviving in fragments that continue to be vandalized (Figure 6).



**Figure 6.** Park in Świerzno, 2016 (source: author).

#### 4.2. The Preservation of Manor and Park Estates in Western Pomerania

The detailed assessment of preservation helped to determine the current status of 46 manor and park estates in Western Pomerania. The relevant data are provided in Table 4. Out of the 46 estates, 13 are in very good condition, having been renovated and preserved in good or very good condition, and the parks having been completely or partially restored.

Table 4. Assessment of the preservation of the manor and park estates.

No.	Village	Preservation of Manor House	Points	Preservation of Park Greenery	Park Layout Preservation	Points	Total	Preservation of Manor and Park Estate
1	Bielin	Very good	3	Moderate	Preserved	2	5	Very good
2	Bolkowice	Poor	1	Moderate	Partially obscured	2	3	Moderate
3	Budzistowo	Very good	3	Very good	Clearly reconstructed	3	6	Very good
4	Czerników	Moderate	2	Moderate	Obscured	1	3	Moderate
5	Darskowo	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
6	Dębogóra	Poor	1	Poor	Partially discernable	1	2	Poor
7	Dobropole	Poor	1	Poor	Partially discernable	1	2	Poor
8	Dreżewo	Moderate	2	Moderate	Obscured	1	3	Moderate
9	Glinna	Very good	3	Moderate	Partially reconstructed	2	5	Very good
10	Karkowo	Ruin	0	Poor	Obscured	1	1	Poor
11	Karnice	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
12	Kąkolewice	Ruin	0	Poor	Obscured	1	1	Poor
13	Kładno	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially obscured	2	4	Moderate
14	Koszewo	Very good	3	Very good	Clearly reconstructed	3	6	Very good
15	Kozia Góra	Poor	1	Poor	Partially discernable	1	2	Poor
16	Krasne	Poor	1	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	3	Moderate
17	Kraśnik Kosz.	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
18	Krzyków	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	3	5	Very good
19	Kulice	Very good	3	Very good	Clearly reconstructed	3	6	Very good
20	Laski Kosz.	Moderate	2	Moderate	Obscured	1	3	Moderate
21	Lekowo	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
22	Lesięcin	Poor	1	Moderate	Obscured	1	2	Poor
23	Leśno Górne	Very good	3	Moderate	Partially reconstructed	2	5	Very good
24	Lubiechowo	Ruin	0	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	2	Poor
25	Lubogoszcz	Ruin	0	Poor	Partially discernable	1	1	Poor
26	Maciejewo	Very good	3	Very good	Preserved	3	6	Very good
27	Małkocin	Very good	3	Very good	Partially reconstructed	2	5	Very good
28	Margowo	Moderate	2	Moderate	Obscured	1	3	Moderate
29	Mechowo	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
30	Modliomowo	Not exist	0	Moderate	Obscured	1	1	Poor
31	Mosty	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
32	Przelewice	Very good	3	Very good	Reconstructed	3	6	Very good
33	Samolino	Not exist	0	Poor	Obscured	1	1	Poor
34	Siemczyno	Moderate/under construction	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate

Table 4. Cont.

No.	Village	Preservation of Manor House	Points	Preservation of Park Greenery	Park Layout Preservation	Points	Total	Preservation of Manor and Park Estate
35	Sienno Dolne	Ruin	0	Moderate	Obscured	1	1	Poor
36	Skarbimierzyce	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
37	Sokoliniec	Poor	1	Poor	Obscured	1	2	Poor
38	Stuchowo	Very good	3	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	5	Very good
39	Świerzno	Poor	1	Poor	Obscured	1	2	Poor
40	Trzygłów	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
41	Unimie	Moderate	2	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	4	Moderate
42	Unin	Moderate	2	Moderate	Obscured	1	3	Moderate
43	Wicimice	Ruin	0	Poor	Obscured	1	1	Poor
44	Wierzbiczin	Ruin	0	Moderate	Obscured	1	1	Poor
45	Wiesiółka	Very good	3	Moderate	Partially discernable	2	5	Very good
46	Wirówek	Very good	3	Very good	Reconstructed	3	6	Very good

The largest group consists of 19 manor and park estates whose preservation is moderate. The layout of the parks is partially visible, whereas in six parks it has been obscured. The condition of the park greenery is good or moderate. The preservation of seventeen estates in this group is good or moderate, while three estates are in poor condition.

The condition of 14 manor and park estates is poor. The layout of the parks is usually obscured, and the condition of the park greenery is poor or moderate. The condition of five manor houses in the group is poor, but comprehensive renovation could potentially restore their original status. However, seven manor houses are in ruins and cannot be renovated, only rebuilt from scratch. In Modlimowo and Samlino, the manor houses no longer exist.

## 5. Discussion

In the aftermath of the Second World War, West Pomerania experienced significant economic, political, and social upheavals that profoundly affected the preservation of its historical landscape. This period marked a disruption to the harmonious development of the region, which had persisted until 1945. The present condition of historical manor and park estates reflects the consequences of shifts in land management practices, notably the establishment of State Agricultural Farms (PGRs). Additionally, the area's transformation into a new societal order further contributed to these changes, underscoring the multifaceted impact of political and social dynamics on the region's heritage.

### 5.1. Changes in the Social Structure in Western Pomerania after World War II and Their Impact on Preserving Cultural Values

Western Pomerania witnessed the emergence of a new societal structure following the Second World War. The displacement of pre-war property owners, who were compelled to leave as the region became part of Poland, marked a significant shift. Despite their forced departure to Germany, these individuals never returned to reclaim their former homes, receiving no compensation for their lost properties. The subsequent influx of settlers comprised a diverse mix of nationalities and cultures, including individuals from present-day Ukraine, Lithuania, and Belarus, regions adjacent to Western Pomerania and central Poland. Among them were former residents of the area, namely Germans and the indigenous Slavic population.

Due to the haphazard allocation of property to newcomers, it was not uncommon for multiple families to be assigned the same property. The impractical division of certain properties often resulted in irreversible damage to buildings. Initially, new settlers predominantly occupied small- and medium-sized farms, while large manor houses and park

estates, comprising over 50% of the region's available properties, remained deserted until the establishment of state farms in 1949 [84,87].

A number of farmers were relocated to Western Pomerania from central or eastern Poland, regions characterized by distinct climate and soil types. For settlers originating from the Eastern Borderlands, the material culture of German villages was entirely unfamiliar. Furthermore, the spatial layout of the former German rural areas differed significantly, featuring predominantly large manor farms instead of small individual ones. Consequently, the newcomers to Western Pomerania had to forge new social connections rooted in diverse traditions and cultures. As a result, the integration of the rural population with their new surroundings was slow, a process that, in some cases, has persisted to this day.

For many years following the war, groups of settlers remained unassimilated, viewing their situation as temporary. Those displaced from the former Eastern Borderlands and Ukraine harbored hopes of returning home, their frustration exacerbated by a sense of injustice surrounding their forced resettlement. Cultural disparities further hindered integration. Fragile community ties, inadequate security, and a lingering animosity toward Germans discouraged new settlers from preserving the material cultural heritage of Western Pomerania. According to Szalewska and Klimko, the population replacement post-1945 disrupted regional traditions and fostered a negative perception of the environment. Additionally, newcomers lacked familiarity with the region's historical culture [88].

The restoration of a capitalist economy in 1989 brought forth new social challenges in rural areas of Poland. Szalewska and Klimko outline the adverse social consequences linked to the collapse of the state agriculture sector (PGRs), including heightened unemployment, instances of violence, hunger, and depression among former PGR employees. These challenges exacerbated the deterioration of historical buildings in rural regions. While some manor and park estates were transferred to state institutions such as universities and local governments, others were sold or leased to private operators. Nevertheless, not all structures could be revitalized to attract new inhabitants. Following the economic transformation, financial constraints faced by both state and private investors further contributed to the neglect of rural estates.

## *5.2. Government Policy and Land Use Changes in Rural Areas after 1945*

After World War II, Poland implemented new socialist regulations governing rural areas, which included the nationalization of private property. The government introduced new laws regarding land management in the 'Recovered Territories'. In accordance with the PKWN manifesto and the agricultural reform law, the State Treasury assumed control of landed properties exceeding 50 hectares of agricultural land, leading to the nationalization of agricultural land, as well as manor and park estates. By 1949, the establishment of State Agricultural Farms (PGRs) became feasible, facilitated by the pre-war prevalence of large landed estates in West Pomerania. State-employed agricultural laborers and administrative staff moved into historical buildings that had previously belonged to noble families before the war.

Simultaneously, as noted by Hopper, rural areas were earmarked for extensive restructuring and received new investments, such as the establishment of livestock farms. However, there was a notable absence of mandates requiring the allocation of land for non-agricultural and non-forest purposes [89]. During the 1960s, there was a surge in the introduction of industrial animal production within State Agricultural Farms (PGRs), specializing in poultry, pigs, and cattle, often situated near or within manor and park estates. Subsequently, in the 1970s and 1980s, new housing developments were constructed for agricultural workers, some adjacent to or within historical parks. The state also encouraged the consolidation of multiple PGRs into unified operational entities during the 1970s. Regrettably, these newly formed structures proved inefficient, with production costs outweighing benefits. Consequently, this inefficiency precipitated a decline in profitability, culminating in the eventual collapse of PGRs within the market economy of the 1990s.

In the aftermath of 1989, spatial management underwent a significant shift from socialism to capitalism. Agricultural operations transitioned towards private ownership. In

accordance with the Act on the Management of Agricultural Property of the State Treasury and Amendments to Certain Acts, the State Agricultural Agency (AWRSP, now KOWR) was established with the mandate to acquire all State Agricultural Farms (PGR) assets by the close of 1993. However, as highlighted by Łaguna, the transformation has raised numerous concerns over the years. The cessation of agricultural production and the abandonment of farms for extended periods, spanning several years or even decades, have not only contributed to environmental degradation but have also been primarily responsible for the deterioration of historical manor and park estates [7,68].

This study has shown that the investment by State Agricultural Farms (PGRs) into many manor and park estates was counterproductive and it eventually led to their decline. Moreover, post-1991, estate owners lacked resources to maintain the estates, and this resulted in their further gradual deterioration. Furthermore, the provisions outlined in the Act on the Management of State Treasury Agricultural Property, permitting the sale of assets in whole or in part, facilitated the fragmentation of the original ownership structure. Consequently, the continued subdivision of large landed estates ensued. Often, farm buildings were owned separately from the manor and park estates, presenting a suboptimal solution for conservation efforts. Regrettably, these reforms failed to provide a framework for restoring the estates to their pre-1945 status. Hence, there is a pressing need for a comprehensive overhaul in land management practices to safeguard the historical and cultural values which have remained to this day.

### 5.3. Interpretation of the Obtained Research Results

According to Kielczewska-Zaleska, PGRs were established primarily on the basis of manor estates, with existing buildings adapted to their new functions. The PGRs also adopted the multiple-plot farmland subdivision characteristic of manor farms operated by large landowners, and mechanical farming was introduced. This applies not only to Western Pomerania but also to Warmia–Masuria, Lower Silesia, and Greater Poland. In these regions, PGR villages were established on former landed estates. This stands in contrast to the southern and central area of Poland, such as Mazovia, Lesser Poland, and Subcarpathia, where the former structure was based on dispersed settlements with a single-plot farmland subdivision. The owners of the latter resisted the conversion to a centralized socialist economy [90].

The research results suggest that the arrival of new settlers to Western Pomerania after 1945 often led to the disintegration of historical manor and park estates. This was due to inappropriate use and alteration which led to the deterioration of many manor houses and stately homes. The introduction of new functions to parks, accompanied by negligence towards the historical tree stand, caused irreversible changes to park layouts. In most parks, there was no maintenance or cleaning work, resulting in the spontaneous growth of random plants and the gradual decay of the historical park composition. The arrangement of paths and clearings has been obscured, and tree-lined avenues along the main compositional axes are often incomplete or supplemented with inappropriate species. Historical features, such as gazebos, viewpoint pavilions, or hills, are hard to find. In many instances, the main vistas, both within the park and in the surrounding landscape, have been obscured by uncontrolled plant growth. The diagnosis reveals that the compositional layout of manor and park estates is fully visible at only 13 sites, partially preserved at 19, and completely obliterated at 14 manor and park estates.

The results support the previous research conducted in Western Pomerania by Żarkowska, Łukasiewicz, Latour, and Nekanda [50,56,57,83]. In 1987, Żarkowska reported that many manor and park estates taken over by the State Agricultural Farms (PGRs) in 1949 had been devastated as a result of inappropriate use. Some buildings which had been well-preserved during the war were completely demolished shortly after, such as the manor house in Łasin [57]. In 1998, Latour stated that while buildings may have been completely destroyed, the parks had kept their visible layouts and rich tree stands [50]. Rutyna's works in 1994 identified characteristic components of manor and park estates rather than analyzing the preservation of

manor parks [51,52]. Meanwhile, studies by Szalewska and Klimko in the 1990s showed that the original layout of many parks in the eastern part of Western Pomerania had been partly or completely obliterated as a result of adverse transformation during the PGR period. This was caused by the introduction of new functions and the destruction of plants [88].

However, there have been no recent comprehensive studies on the Western Pomerania region to compare with the findings presented in this paper. It was discovered that several estates had deteriorated significantly after the collapse of the PGRs (including Bolkowice, Dębogóra, Dobropole, Lesiecin, and Sienno Dolne). The field research also found that neglect on the part of conservation services and the National Support Centre for Agriculture (KOWR, previously AWRSP) had contributed to the adverse process. The KOWR is still responsible for the management of PGR assets. Over the past 20 years, neglect has contributed to the degradation of many historical park estates and buildings, including some of exceptional value, such as the manor house of the von Osten family in Wicimice, one of the largest residences in Western Pomerania, or the half-timbered manor estate in Świerzno, the only existing baroque manor in Western Pomerania. The same group of estates also includes stately homes in Karkowo, Kozia Góra, and Sokoliniec. The research shows that only six manor and park estates which were in poor or moderate condition in 2004 have been renovated by their new owners in recent years. These include manors in Glinna, Przelewiec, Skarbimierzyce, Stuchowo, and Wiesiółka, as well as Siemczyno, where the renovation is still underway. The preservation of manor and park estates vary, as confirmed by Paszkowski in his analysis providing a detailed description of the palace in Maciejewo [79].

The decline of historical manor and park estates is continuing in the Recovered Territories, which encompass the western and northern regions of contemporary Poland that were granted to Poland according to the provisions of the 1945 Potsdam Conference [91]. This is confirmed by research carried out in Lower Silesia [63,64], Warmia and Masuria [67], and Gdańsk Pomerania [7,68], where the original population was resettled and PGRs were established after the war. However, Lower Silesia has more buildings revitalized by new owners and repurposed as hotels and guesthouses than anywhere else. This is illustrated by the creation of the Valley of Palaces and Gardens as a tourist attraction [92]. Moreover, Zachariasz notes that manor and park estates in indigenous Polish areas, such as Lesser Poland, were considered unwanted heritage in the post-war period. At present, the preservation of the estates varies greatly and, despite the revitalization of many sites, a large group of estates remains neglected [10]. Zachariasz points out that the transformation of the landscape, which had been a slow and harmonious process, took on a completely different pace in the post-war period. The alteration of the spatial structure of manor and park estates led to the loss of their diversity, cohesion, and identity, which were characteristic of various regions in Poland and Europe [21].

Around 9000 gardens and manor parks have been preserved in Poland, according to various sources [20,75]. These findings can be compared with the report on the cultural heritage protection system in Poland after 1989 [93], which indicates that 50–60% of historical parks are in poor condition and require comprehensive revitalization. Sikora confirmed that manor parks are often overgrown and transformed due to their adaptation to new functions, division between different owners, and modernization, which can lead to their being undervalued as historical monuments [76]. This adversely affects their protection; however, they are still considered important landmarks and an integral element of the rural environment in many regions of Poland and Europe, as has been confirmed by Rosłoń, Sikora, and Zachariasz [6,10,21,76,94]. The reason for the poor preservation of manor houses and stately homes is often the lack of legal protection. Specifically, they are not listed in the register of historical buildings. In Western Pomerania, 683 manor parks are listed as monuments, but 391 of them (52.5%) are listed without the main architectural landmark, i.e., a stately home or manor. This means that the manor houses are not legally protected. The situation is similar in Silesia and Lubusz Land [6,76].



## 6. Conclusions

This research aimed to answer the following questions: Is the historical cultural landscape resistant to transformation and the new management of space due to political changes? Have valuable elements of cultural heritage, such as manor and park estates, resisted the changes made during the operation of the PGRs? What is their current state of preservation?

Manor and park estates are valuable elements of the cultural heritage and a distinguishing feature of the rural landscape in Western Pomerania [60,66]. However, they have often been subject to changes since 1945, including alterations to their functions, inappropriate renovations, and decades of neglect. Examination of their preservation shows that 42% of the estates surveyed have undergone changes to their original form and spatial composition, and their preservation status is assessed as moderate. Nearly 30% of them are in poor condition, which hinders their full revitalization and restoration of cultural and natural values. Only 28% of the manor and park estates are preserved in a very good state.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the degradation of the manor and park estates is ongoing, and few sites have been restored. An assessment of preservation efforts is necessary to determine measures to halt this decline. The cultural heritage of Western Pomerania is an integral part of the region's identity. Manor and park estates are historical monuments associated with the people who once lived in this area. Therefore, they should be protected to promote sustainable development and preserve Europe's common cultural heritage for future generations [1,10,95].

Although this study only covered relatively few manor and park estates in Western Pomerania due to the region's size and the large number of estates, it still provides a valuable assessment of their preservation. The selected estates are well-documented in source materials, allowing for a comprehensive analysis. Assessment of their preservation status was provided in intervals (2004, 2016, 2023), which helped distinguish changes introduced during the operation of the PGRs and in the past 30 years. The assessment depended on the availability of historical materials, most of which unfortunately were lost during the war. Further research may also require a comparative analysis of documents from the neighboring German region of Vorpommern (Pomerania). It is also advisable to analyze the situation in other regions of Poland and Eastern European countries.

Knowledge of the preservation status of manor and park estates is crucial in compensating for the shortage of up-to-date information about historical parks and greenery in Poland. The development of the inventory of historic gardens has decreased over the past 30 years, contributing to the current lack of detailed information about their preservation status [76]. This has been confirmed by Rosłoń, who notes, "There is no comprehensive study on manor/palace parks located in rural areas of a collective nature throughout the country" [6]. A complete diagnosis of the preservation status of such valuable components of cultural heritage can support their protection and preservation for future generations in accordance with the provisions of the Venice Charter [11,76]. The preservation of historical landscapes is particularly important for sustainable development in the future [2].

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