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The Kosznajderia phenomenon On the complexity of the identity and heritage of the Pomeranian Region

Introduction

Kosznajderia, though one of the lesser known subregions of Pomerania, unquestionably exemplifies that region's cultural richness, as well as the unobvious and often difficult relations between ethnic and national groups. Significantly, Pomerania in the past, "being a borderland in both geographical and sociocultural senses, was subject to the influences of different political, cultural and economic centres that often competed and fought fiercely with each other", wherein the greatest significance attached to the conflict between Poland and Germany (Obracht-Prondzyński 2010: 9). The continuous rivalry between state organisms caused a situation where, among other things, "the culture of Pomerania is like a palimpsest, on which every successive century has written its own text, often erasing (...) what had been written before. But it sometimes also happened that what had been rejected and forgotten (...) with time was restored to memory. This process has been particularly visible in recent times" (ibidem: 10).

From today's perspective, it is interesting to examine Kosznajderia not only historically, but also in sociological and ethnological terms. In the latter case, the central points of interest to researchers are above all the heritage and identity of today's inhabitants of the area, and the place and significance of Kosznajderia and the Kosznajders in the shaping of social and cultural identification. This research perspective alludes to a label popularly attached to Kosznajderia in regional and local discourse, namely *fenomen tożsamości*, a "phenomenon of identity" (as in the 2013 work titled *Kosznajderia –*

fenomen tożsamości).¹ The purpose of this article is to examine what the essence of that phenomenon is in contemporary times, and how it is present in the subregion and in local communities.

The material presented here originates from field research carried out in the southern part of the Chojnice rural administrative district (gmina Chojnice). Most of the research work was done as part of the project “Tradition for development. In search of the potentials of Pomeranian regional cultures”.² The studied area has strong links with the Kosznajderian heritage. Lying between Chojnice and Tuchola,³ Kosznajderia was inhabited for more than 500 years by the ethnic group known as the Kosznajders. One of the most widely available and best-known information pamphlets about the subregion states that:

Kosznajderia consists of barely twenty villages⁴ concentrated in a small part of Pomerelia, lying south-east of Chojnice, inhabited from the late Middle Ages until the Second World War by a German population, distinguished from its neighbours linguistically and ethnically. The centre of this unique land for centuries was Ostrowite – the Kosznajderian “capital”. (Szwach 2007)

Research on the heritage and identity of the inhabitants of today’s Kosznajderia was carried out in the years 2019–2020. It consisted of wide-ranging data analysis (based on sources such as local websites, information pamphlets, historical and popular science publications, and local authority documents, including from cultural institutions), detailed individual interviews (with formal and informal local leaders), freely structured interviews with residents, and observation of daily life and local events, combined with photographic documentation. The cycle of research activities ended with a meeting in Ostrowite at which preliminary findings were presented, attended by several dozen interested residents from the southern part of Chojnice rural district and its sur-

¹ The inscription “Kosznajderia fenomen tożsamości” also appears on the village cultural centre building in Silno (this being related to a project carried out under the same name); see e.g. Barton-Piórkowska (2016).

² The project was carried out in 2018–2020 under a grant from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage, in the component “Folk and traditional culture”, awarded to the Baltic Sea Cultural Centre in Gdańsk, in partnership with the University of Gdańsk Pomeranian Centre of Culture Research and the Kashubian Institute in Gdańsk.

³ Historians also list the towns of Sępólno and Kamień Krajeński.

⁴ Different sources give various numbers of villages: from 19 to more than 20. From a historical perspective, determining the extent of Kosznajderia appears problematic. Researchers point out that the number of Kosznajderian villages (those with both a Kosznajderian and a general Pomeranian population) increased over time.

roundings. Statements made by those attending were also taken into account in the formulation of conclusions from the research.

Primarily in view of the initial data analysis, the chosen geographical starting point for the field studies was Ostrowite. The main villages (in Pomeranian voivodeship) that were selected for study were (in alphabetical order): Angowice, Ciechocin, Lichnowy, Nowe Ostrowite, Ogorzeliny, Ostrowite, Pawłowo, and Silno. Field research was conducted in Ciechocin, Lichnowy, Nowe Ostrowite, Silno, Ostrowite and Pawłowo, and also in Chojnice (cultural events and meetings at institutions, relating to Kosznajderia and the Kosznajders). These villages were chosen based on the data analysis and on interviews conducted at successive stages of the field research. Visits were made to villages that are identified contemporarily by local leaders as belonging to Kosznajderia or as places which are similar to each other and constitute a relatively cohesive whole within the administrative district. Account was also taken of cultural offerings and how they differed across the area of interest.

Publications relating to the area in question focus mainly on its past, with its links to the Kosznajder people. These works are primarily of historical and geographical value. Many of them are written by historians, often as a result of regional conferences. Other publications consist of memoirs of Kosznajders and their descendants (including information on daily life, family histories, and biographies of people of importance to the community). A significant portion of the written sources consists of pamphlets, maps, and brochures focusing on the material heritage of Kosznajderia (including descriptions of individual villages, historical buildings, cycling trails, etc.). It should be noted that an important and distinctive role in the popularisation of Kosznajderia's history and heritage is played by the Sandry Brdy Local Action Group Association (Lokalna Grupa Działania Sandry Brdy), led by Grażyna Wera-Malatyńska. In spite of numerous initiatives and publications, which began to be created to a considerable extent only at the start of the 21st century, both researchers and local leaders emphasise the need for further research, not only strictly historical, but interdisciplinary, also concerning social and cultural matters, including questions of the post-war destinies of the Kosznajders and Kosznajderia, and the contemporary situation. The research that has been carried out in recent years is slowly filling this gap.⁵

⁵ The present-day inhabitants of Kosznajderia, particularly within today's Kuyavian-Pomeranian voivodeship, were the subject of research by Tomasz Marcysiak (e.g. Marcysiak 2018, 2019). Recently that author has also made an analysis of the semantic fields of the notions of Kosznajderia and Kosznajder, based on Polish press articles from the periods of the Partitions and

The uniqueness of Kosznajderia – the historical context

Although in the modern language used to refer to this area the name Kosznajderia is dominant, it should be noted that in the past, a more common term was the name for the people living there: the Kosznajders. Historians indicate difficulties in establishing the etymology of these words. One frequently encountered proposal refers to the words *Koschenewen* or *Koschenewjen*, denoting the Catholic Germans who from the mid-fifteenth century inhabited villages between Chojnice, Tuchola, and Sępólno. These terms appeared in the literature in the early 1830s, and the somewhat later form *Coschneider* was also adopted permanently in Polish, as *Kosznajder*, plural *Kosznajdrzy* (Szwankowski 2013: 17). Fr. Paul Panske linked the word to the surname Kossnewsky, which appeared in a fifteenth-century document issued for the village of Piastoszyn (ibidem). Publications also contain suggestions linked to *kosa*, the Polish word for scythe, as a tool made common by the immigrant German settlers – hence *kosowi żniwiarze*, “scythe harvesters”. A “less serious version” indicates that the Kosznajders “like the Kashubian peasants, took part in the Vienna campaign, where as exceptionally zealous Catholics they gained fame for beheading infidels, and thus acquired the name ‘Kopfabshneider’” (ibidem). Further suggested derivations relate to a word for a castrator of cattle, or to *koszonosz* (“basket carrier”), referring to the making of earthworks by local peasants during the siege of Chojnice in the Thirteen Years’ War (ibidem). There are also mentions in the literature of the German word *kouzen* (“to babble”), used in reference to those people by their High- and Middle-German-speaking neighbours (Wałdoch 2011: 144). The Kosznajders spoke a Low German dialect, and surnames specific to that dialect, today usually Polonised, are common in and around the counties of Chojnice and Tuchola (Szwankowski 2013: 18).

The Kosznajder community developed and sustained a relatively stable culture and social structure. However, because of their adjacency to other

the Second Polish Republic, which he compared with the modern understanding of the terms among people living in the area (Marcysiak 2022). In 2022 there was published a collective monograph titled *Kosznajderia. Post-war Fates and Contemporary Identity Discourses* (Ciechorska-Kulesza and Obracht-Prondzyński eds. 2022), containing the results of historical research into selected policies of the communist authorities in Kosznajderia in 1945–1956 (Węsierski 2022) and questions of the identity of contemporary inhabitants of the region based on spoken history (Marcysiak 2022), as well as social activity shaping local identification and local culture (Ciechorska-Kulesza 2022). Research on the Kosznajders from a political science perspective has been proposed by, among others, Marcin Wałdoch (2011) and Jacek Knopek (2013).

communities and political changes, the Kosznajders often entered into various kinds of relations with others:

For years they co-created the settlement picture of this part of Pomerania, neighbouring the Borowiaks and Krajniaks to the south and south-east, and native Pomeranian and Kashubian populations to the north and west. Through the following centuries of political heritage this subregion abounded in numerous contacts with the Polish and German states, a consequence of which was the fact that the land was permeated by people from Wielkopolska and Kuyavia on the one hand, and by Prussians and Germans on the other. (Knopek 2013: 5)

Polish publications on Kosznajderia and its people, appearing mainly in the past decade or two, reflect the historical transformations affecting the area and its community.⁶ They refer, among other things, to the establishment and the history of German settlements or Kosznajder villages in the Middle Ages, up to 1466 (e.g. Zonenberg 2013, 2003). Researchers discuss such questions as settlement movements, including the circumstances of the settlement of people brought in by the Teutonic Order from 1309 onwards. Of particular importance were the migrations to this area, previously inhabited mainly by Slavs, of people from south-western Germany. In 1433, Polish–Hussite divisions invaded southern Pomerania, and this led to the siege of Chojnice and the destruction of nearby villages, particularly in the south. The Teutonic state suffered extensive losses, and to recultivate the land left unused following the war, it was decided to bring in settlers from the vicinity of Osnabrück (e.g. Wałdoch 2011).

Scholars studying this period also discuss the question of the existence of a Kosznajder community. For example, Sławomir Zonenberg explains:

In our view, in the Middle Ages it is certainly not possible to speak of the existence of a Kosznajder community in the sense in which it existed in a later period. It is also not possible to consider the area at that time as some kind of separate territory, since it was subject to the same changes and influences as the adjacent areas. We presume, however, that in that period it will be possible to speak of the existence of certain factors, such as the ethnic origin of colonisers and the related customs and specific language, that enabled the formation over a long period (...) of a Kosznajder community. (Zonenberg 2013: 90)

⁶ In listing publications and studies relating to Kosznajderia and its people, attention should also be drawn to those that consider the “pre-Kosznajderian” heritage. This concerns primarily archaeological research relating to prehistoric times, especially in the village of Ostrowite and its vicinity (e.g. Sikora and Trzciński 2013).

In descriptions of Kosznajderia in the Nobles' Republic, questions taken up include those relating to settlement and the social structure, including the property ownership structure, which included the state or Crown, the noble class, and the Church (e.g. Groth 2013). Andrzej Groth points out:

Certain common factors connected (...) the royal settlements (...). These included a common legal tradition resulting from foundations based on German town law, and a commonality of administration (as royal lands), language and religion. All residents of the villages in question were Catholics, and the impact of the Reformation there was marginal. In the longer term, these factors led to the formation of bonds among the inhabitants of these settlements, as a result of which in the nineteenth century they constituted the main core of Kosznajderia. (Groth 2013: 168).

Kosznajderia in the Prussian state (1772–1920) is described primarily in the context of demographic questions, social structure, the economy, authority, associations, and scholarship pointing to the development of Kosznajderia as a community (e.g. Szwankowski 2013). Researchers also highlight the emergence of ethnic nationalism in the mid-nineteenth century, and the fact that “Polish–German and Catholic–Protestant relations became the most important axis of social conflicts” (Knopek 2013: 5).

Kosznajderia in the years of the Second Polish Republic is quite richly described in the literature (e.g. Jastrzębski 2003, 2013). Historians have published research on, among other things, individual villages, their population structure, economy, daily life, and culture, especially material culture. The Kosznajders are also viewed as a German minority or an ethnic group that formed in that period a small enclave “retaining its cultural distinctiveness” (Swoch 2007). As Włodzimierz Jastrzębski writes, “certainly this ethnic group differed in language and customs from the majority of citizens. However, analysing their behaviour, there was no sign here of anti-Polish or anti-state political activity” (Jastrzębski 2013: 281). The question of relations with and attitudes to the group's neighbours is also interpreted in somewhat different ways, for example: “in the interwar period the Kosznajders as an ethnic group did not adopt an unambiguous stance towards the Polish state” (Wałdoch 2011: 139).

There is no question, however, that the Catholic Church was a link between Kosznajders and Poles, as became particularly visible in the period of the quite difficult situation of Catholics in the Second Reich. The Kosznajders appreciated their freedom of religion in the Second Polish Republic (Wałdoch 2011). Nevertheless, the Church was also a field of conflicts, friction, and rivalry – for example, over numbers of Polish- and German-speaking priests, or the language of church services (*ibidem*). Researchers also point to the so-

cial cementing function performed by part of the organisation, primarily the “pragmatic” part, bringing local residents together in connection with shared needs and interests, as in the case of a Polish–German fire service or hunting associations (*ibidem*).

Of great significance – particularly in the interwar period – are those personalities who, through their actions and works, helped preserve a consciousness of the Kosznajders’ cultural and ethnic identity. Primary among these were Father Joseph Rink, Father Paul Panske, and bishop Augustyn Rosentreter. Significantly, many texts published today in Poland about the history of Kosznajderia not only focus on the source materials of these and other Kosznajderian authors, but also describe the past situation of Kosznajderia through the discovery and popularisation of the biographies and works of these figures (e.g. Rosentreter 2003, Behrendt 2019, Szwankowski 2003).

Kosznajderia and the Kosznajders during the Second World War are described, in the short period after 1945, mainly in the context of military activity in the region, Polish–German relations, the Kosznajders’ involvement in underground activity, particularly in the Polish Home Army (e.g. Jastrzębski 2016), the role of the Catholic Church, and migrations and expulsions (e.g. Jastrzębski 2013, Stankowski 2003).

The breach of historical, social and cultural continuity that occurred in 1945 is one of the main themes of today’s regional and local discourse concerning Kosznajderia and the Kosznajders. Attention is often drawn to the lack of knowledge about the post-war period and the need to fill this gap. Both researchers and local leaders point to the absence of research relating to the Kosznajders who remained in the area after the war, as well as the new inhabitants who have formed a new social fabric. As was claimed at a conference titled “Diocesan and Monastic Clergy from Kosznajderia and Its Role in the Life of the Church” in 2019, “Kosznajderia ended in 1945, we are talking about the people from those times, although there were also some who did not flee, who remained” (male, 50–70, Ostrowite, 6 April 2019).⁷ The period from the second half of the twentieth century up to modern times is perceived mainly in the context of research concerning the descendants of the Kosznajders and their post-war experiences. Sociological and ethnological research, including

⁷ Quotations from respondents (obtained during the field research described in this article) are followed by information in parentheses: the respondent’s sex and age or age range, and the place and date of the research. The results of the research are consistently presented in accordance with the methodological principles of the project under which the present research was carried out: descriptions of respondents are given, but their anonymity is preserved.

that focusing on contemporary transformations of sociocultural life in the area, appears in works on Kosznajderia only sporadically.

Historians in their publications, as well as regional and local leaders, underline the “newness” of knowledge about Kosznajderia and the Kosznajders in Poland. This results above all from the post-war policies of the Polish authorities:

he negative image of the German nation that was created in Poland after the end of the Second World War did not serve the conduct of credible research into German ethnic groups living in the country's territory. (Szwankowski 2013: 9)

As the same author points out, even in the 1980s “information on the several hundred years' existence of a German population concentrated in the area in question, professing the Roman Catholic faith and to some extent Polonised, could not reach the public consciousness, even in the academic world” (Szwankowski 2013: 9). In the past, Kosznajderia's history was dealt with mainly by German researchers. Today's historical research, carried out largely by Polish authors, addresses a range of themes related to that community, attempting to “make up for” the years of Kosznajderia's absence from scholarly discourse. Nevertheless, Polish-language academic publications still leave an impression of incompleteness, due to the opening of new threads concerning the Kosznajders and Kosznajderia. The threads that were present in the pre-1945 German literature continue to dominate. One of the more important topics worthy of examination in more depth is that of Polish–German relations. As historians note, the Kosznajders' connections with Polishness “do not raise any doubts” (Jastrzębski 2003: 9). They lived, after all, in the Nobles' Republic for three centuries and in interwar Poland for two decades. Significantly, Kosznajders and Poles intermarried, which undoubtedly led to the mutual permeation of their cultures (*ibidem*). The same historian writes: “At present, when the situation favours Polish–German reconciliation, a question asked by many Poles and Germans becomes relevant – whether and to what degree they are descendants of the Kosznajders” (Jastrzębski 2003: 9). Authors believe that Polish–German relations and the identities of former Kosznajders require further research, which may, however, highlight the problematic nature of the area's history and, by the same token, contemporary processes relating to identity and collective memory:

It seems today that, thanks to research being conducted and conferences devoted to Kosznajderia, the myth of the Kosznajder as “Volksdeutsch” has been disproved. At the same time, a myth has been created of the Kosznajder as Pole, or possibly as stateless. In-

convenient aspects of the memory of historical local identity have been removed with the intent of “redeeming the memory” of the Kosznajders. (Wałdoch 2011: 136)

In the scholarly and popularising discourse related to Kosznajderia in the context of the lands’ post-war history (which is much more seldom considered than questions of pre-war history) it is emphasised that the Kosznajderian heritage is continued by the new inhabitants and that a relative cultural continuity is maintained:

In place of the previous residents, there came to this area a Polish population from several regions, not always characterised by homogeneity or common origin. In spite of these contradictions, the memory of the Kosznajders remains alive, and not only thanks to the several dozen families that did not leave Poland in the post-war conditions; that community is still attested to by the households, culture, cultivation of land and raising of livestock, vegetable and fruit growing. Some of these professions were and still are cultivated. (Knopek 2013: 14)

The above excerpt is one of many examples (based to some extent, it would seem, on intuition and wishful thinking) of descriptions of the contemporary sociocultural situation in the area in question. This subject, with regard to research in recent social history, and above all in sociology or ethnology, still requires much investigation.

Contemporary narratives concerning the post-war settlers who arrived in the area refer on the one hand to the “end of Kosznajderia”, and on the other to the difficult Polish–German relations. According to one local leader:

Those people who arrived here in these lands, let’s assume from the Kielce region – I’m giving an example – they settled immediately in the homes of the Kosznajders, and... and really in all kindness we can’t be surprised that they lived the whole time in the fear that that German, that Kosznajder, would come and take it from them. (...) After the war that name was associated with Germans. The name was used, it existed. There was even an insult, “you Kosznajder”, just like “you German”. (Female, 50–70, Chojnice, 6 March 2019)

To sum up, the contemporary work of historians and people with an interest in Kosznajderia, although it underlines the significance of recent history and the contemporary situation, involves above all discovering local histories based on written historical sources and the analysis of elements of material culture (mainly cemeteries, churches, houses and farms). This is connected with the focus on making up for the years of loss and on the need to preserve as much as possible of what still remains in the landscape. And this means above all “works of beauty: the monuments and churches of our predecessors –

the Kosznajders” (male, 50+, Ostrowite, 6 April 2019; speech at the conference “Diocesan and Monastic Clergy from Kosznajderia and Its Role in the Life of the Church”); or “(...) the architecture that we live with here. These are our riches: that church, those beautiful Kosznajderian houses” (female, 30–50, Ostrowite, 13 March 2019).

Kosznajderian ambivalences

Looking at Kosznajderia from a historical perspective, one may notice some ambivalences, also manifested explicitly in contemporary narratives concerning the area, its past, its heritage, and also the identity of the people living there. Kosznajderia and its inhabitants and neighbours illustrate the complex ethnic processes and relations in Pomerania. However, it seems that in many respects, in view of the complexity, and by the same token the obscurity and ambiguity of social, cultural, historical, religious, economic and political configurations, they constitute an exceptional case.

Beginning with recent history, attention must be paid to the period following the Second World War, whose consequences “did not leave untouched the local communities that, by way of colonisation or migrations, had arrived in the area of the Polish state since medieval times. The Kosznajders were one such community” (Stankowski 2003: 100). The shift of Poland’s borders led to the migration, resettlement and expulsion of millions of inhabitants. This naturally also applied to the Kosznajders, who after the war were “treated as colonists” (Stankowski 2003: 101). In this sense, one can speak of the end of that community. Although today’s regional and local discourse is strongly dominated by references to the area’s Kosznajderian past, with very frequent uses of the term Kosznajderia or Kosznajderian villages, the contemporary perception of the area, especially of the new (mainly post-war) inhabitants, is marked by a separation of the present-day situation and population from the former, true Kosznajders. This is illustrated by the following statement made by one local leader:

After the war there were few who remained out of those real Kosznajders. Names keep coming up, some of them, there are a few cases that they live in Germany and look for their families’ roots. But new people have already arrived there... (Female, 30–50, Ciechocin, 1 August 2019)

The new post-war communities in Kosznajderia created societies with a post-migration character, as is also manifested in their identity (Marcysiak

2019). Significantly, however, the area of Kosznajderia had already been within Poland's borders before the Second World War, which distinguishes the new post-war society there from the populations that settled the so-called recovered territories. This area has been claimed to be exceptional in that, among other things, the new settlers to a large extent adopted customs from the former inhabitants. Many researchers confirm that, in spite of the change of populations, the "spirit of Kosznajderia" lived on after the war, at least in a certain sense. Processes of settlement and attitudes to the new place of residence were different here than in the "recovered" lands. One regional activist gives the following account:

A feature of this area is that it is not part of the recovered territories. Even just on the border of Chojnice it's another world, because that used to be Germany. Here there was a mix (...) Pre-war inhabitants remained, and new ones arrived as well, who adopted the customs of the old ones. There were certain patterns, so they had to adapt somehow. It wasn't a case of destroying what wasn't ours. That can't be seen even in those villages, in those Kosznajderian villages where it was said that the new arrivals got into the old residents' beds while they were still warm (...) However (...) there was no destruction of the existing property, which I consider to be something fundamental here. Those who arrived here, even if they had less ability, they learned. Often they were from small farms, they didn't know what to do here. Next door there was some Pole, next door there was someone or other, so it wasn't that they were going to a completely foreign, German, land. (...) And that Kosznajderia also survived. But the area was always developing (...) Religion actually connects people. They met in that one church, perhaps that was a kind of bond. (Female, 50–70, Ostrowite, 16 March 2019)

In spite of the breach of social, cultural and economic continuity, it was primarily the Catholic religion and the material culture that connected the new inhabitants with the land and its heritage, and in a certain sense with the pre-war Kosznajders. The particular cultural distinction of the post-war settlers had a significant "base" in the new place of residence in the form of elements of culture related to Catholicism and the organisation of life around farming. When asked to describe the former inhabitants – whom the great majority regard as the "real" Kosznajders – locals usually emphasise the fact that they were Catholics, that "they were well-off farmers", and that "Kosznajderian farms were the models to follow" (female, 30–50, Chojnice, 13 March 2019). Respondents refer not only to Kosznajderia's favourable natural conditions for crop growing, which certainly were and still are an asset, but also to the knowledge, skill and industriousness of the former population.

This kind of idealisation of Kosznajderia's past, found in some of the accounts concerning its former inhabitants, also carries over to narratives on

Polish–German relations, in this case mainly those between Poles and Kosznajders. In today’s regional and local discourse greater emphasis is seen to be placed on integration and on what connected the Kosznajders with their neighbours, rather than on animosity. Nevertheless, respondents also point out the problematic and multidimensional nature of this subject:

Without conflicts, that is a good description. So they got on with life, the sides accepted each other (...) The Kosznajders maybe married Poles sometimes, but didn’t marry Protestant Germans at all. They brought others in, they got together in that way, although it also happened between villages. They – that community – for five hundred years in that region formed some kind of community with the Poles. And from that, somehow, from their presence, we... as a community, as an area, and in terms of relations, in terms, in terms of... I don’t know... spiritual matters, we profited a lot, but there’s also the history and... and... as if, here, well... Nonetheless, the Germans here, I would say quite a lot... they had a lot of influence, and that caused animosities at some point. On the other hand it’s also... like an irony of history, because it was like this – they weren’t regarded as natives over there, and here by those actually – well, because just at the time when the Third Reich started... those animosities were cranked up. (Female, 30–50, Ostrowite, 7 April 2019)

The restoration of the memory of Kosznajderia, which began during the period of post-communist transformation, is part of the wider phenomenon of the strengthening of regionalism:

The transformation and the associated change in the view of the past caused the “discovery” of a multicultural heritage of Pomerania. People began to take an interest in minorities, including the German one, and also in the Catholic Kosznajders who used a Low German dialect in everyday speech. (Klein-Wrońska and Kwaśniewska 2017: 180)

The restoration of the memory of Kosznajderian culture brought to light ambivalences concerning that land, its people and its history. Leaders active in the field of regional and local history and heritage refer largely with understanding to the passive attitude or negative reactions of residents to actions serving to rediscover Kosznajderia. They admit that they have encountered and sometimes still encounter such reactions:

And really we at this time are still guests in this area, although the truth is that at the very beginning, on the first projects, we met with, for example – maybe not an accusation, that’s too big a word – but there was indeed something like that, “oh, those Germans, will you stop... promoting them.” (Female, 50+, Chojnice, 13 March 2019)

They also point out that knowledge about the area’s history among residents is varied and often superficial, and comments of the “glorifying the Germans”

type are examples of misunderstanding of that history. However, they note that residents' attitudes are becoming more and more positive, and many of them are beginning to take an interest in the history of their villages, including in the context of Kosznajderia. For this reason among others, part of the activity of organisations, especially at regional or district level, is focused on popularising these matters among residents.

Findings from interviews and observations of residents, made in the course of the discussed research project, confirm the views of some leaders concerning locals' attitudes to and understanding of history. It even appears that the "gulf" between what the local leaders and elites say about Kosznajderia and the Kosznajders and what "ordinary residents" say is even greater than is described by those dealing with this subject matter whom we interviewed. Above all, residents are found to lack knowledge in the context of the discourse relating to Kosznajderia that has been developed since the late 1990s. Even elderly people who are interested in the area and its past at the local level, being local experts in the context of the post-war history of these lands, often have a poor grasp of pre-war history. The story of the Kosznajders seems to be reserved for the elites, those interested in the subject, familiar with the relevant publications. The following statement by an elderly female resident and informal local leader may serve as an example:

My dear, it was named after the war with this word Kosznajderia (...) It was Kosznajderia because German and Polish farm workers lived here. And they called that trail Kosznajderia. But it was after the war, that word... I grew up, got old, and I'm only hearing that word now. For a few years. For a few years, I'm not saying just today (...). In this... In that (...) book... published here by that Morenka, there's that word Kosznajderia. And the Kosznajders were called that... I don't know now. Did it mean the Germans specifically or did it mean the Poles, you know. Who were here... But it rather meant the Germans. (Female, 70+, Ostrowite, 28 July 2019)

Residents are not surprised when researchers ask them about Kosznajderia and the Kosznajders; they certainly know these words. However, their knowledge appears superficial. Respondents are aware that "such people were here once". However, they rarely use the term Kosznajderia; they are more likely to speak of the Kosznajders. Most of them claim that the Kosznajderian heritage is a source of pride, something that distinguishes the area from others, but they are not able to say anything more on that subject. They usually suggest asking "specialists" such as local and regional leaders (including primarily clergy and associations) or enquiring at specific places, mainly the Kosznajder House in Silno, the church in Ostrowite, the Sandry Brdy Local Action Group, or the District Culture Centre.

Many local leaders from the studied villages (village chief officials, members of local church organisations and NGOs, including village women's clubs, and village club animators) underline the need to acquire knowledge about Kosznajderia, particularly in relation to the Kosznajders' daily life and culture (for example about crafts, such as embroidery and cuisine). Many consider such knowledge very important for their activities; for example, they use it in activation, animation and education, related both to festive activities (organisation of local celebrations and festivals) and everyday activity (the work of village clubs, women's clubs, etc.). It seems that the needs of local leaders in the fields of animation and activation concern not so much precise scholarly knowledge related to the reconstruction of history and events, but social history (everyday life) and discovery of the Kosznajderian culture, which might serve to expand the still fairly sparse semantic range of the "Kosznajderia phenomenon".

Explaining the Kosznajderia phenomenon

In the forefront of the contemporary perception of Kosznajderia and the Kosznajders are those features that both make them distinctive and connect them with the area's present-day inhabitants. Chief among these features are religious denomination – the Kosznajders were Catholics – and way of working – they were mainly farmers. These relationships are emphasised today by both residents and local leaders. Respondents refer to the strong faith of the former inhabitants of these lands, as well as the material heritage they left behind, especially their churches, farm buildings, and houses.

The foremost elements of material heritage present in residents' consciousness are the characteristic large houses built of red brick, and the farm buildings. One of the most recognisable such buildings is a still inhabited house in Ostrowite. Another "flagship" Kosznajderian element in the physical space is a thatched log cottage in Silno dating from the first half of the nineteenth century, which has been moved to the vicinity of the Culture Centre and now serves as a museum and educational site. Residents point out that this is the last building of its type reminding us of the presence of the Kosznajders in this region. The high standard of agriculture in "the Kosznajders' times"⁸ is evidenced

⁸ This is an expression often used by residents in their responses, and refers to an imprecisely defined period during which the area was inhabited by the Kosznajders. It is often used when referring to the place's distinction in terms of agriculture, infrastructure, the multiplicity of institutions and organisations, and the educated clergy.

by today's buildings and spatial planning. These also provide a reminder of the well-developed system of agricultural and food cooperatives – that is, a highly commodified agriculture – which was made possible by the relatively good rail transport links and the closeness of the towns of Chojnice and Tuchola.

The links between the Kosznajders and the modern community are attested to by numerous churches, which are also identified by residents as important elements of Kosznajderian heritage. They include the church of St. James in Ostrowite (Gothic, from 1402, rococo interior), the church of St. Martin in Ciechocin (17th-century, filial church of the parish in Ostrowite), the church of St. Jadwiga of Silesia in Lichnowy (neo-Gothic, the fourth church built on the site), and the church of the Elevation of the Cross in Ogorzeliny (from the mid-14th century), to name just a few. Notably, reported elements of the material heritage linked to the Kosznajders also include roadside shrines, and especially cemeteries, where the graves of pre-war residents can still be found. Most of these adjoin churches, but there are also other examples, such as the village cemetery in Angowice. The need to protect and conserve Kosznajderian gravestones is frequently raised during local discussions and meetings concerning Kosznajderia. For example, at the conference “Diocesan and Monastic Clergy from Kosznajderia and Its Role in the Life of the Church” on 6 April 2019 and at a meeting with local residents on 3 March 2020 (both taking place in Ostrowite), participants devoted much attention to the importance of cemeteries in the context of the protection and popularisation of the Kosznajderian heritage. Note was taken of the need for systemic solutions, including the provision of financial resources to enable gravestones to be left in place, renovated, and protected against removal in the future.

The question of cemeteries leads on to the phenomenon of people searching for German-sounding names (the most commonly mentioned being Warnke, Behrendt, Rhode, Panske, and Hoppe)⁹ and rediscovering the stories of former inhabitants. In this context, locals refer to the efforts undertaken by descendants of the Kosznajders to discover their roots. This includes both visitors to the area from Germany and those who remained in Poland. Attention should also be paid to local spoken history concerning the Kosznajders, exemplified by the recollections passed from generation to generation, in some way connected with a particular village. For example, in Ciechocin there are accounts of the Warnke family (a mixed marriage), which ran a large farm, even after the Second World War – local residents who worked there generally had fond memories of those times and of the people. A well-remembered figure in Os-

⁹ For names of Kosznajders in contemporary Polish studies, see for example Breza (2003).

trowite is Hans Janowitz, a Kosznajder who remained in the area after 1945. He is mentioned by older villagers, and also – based on their accounts – by their descendants and by new residents of the village. Other elements of Kosznajderian heritage that are still present today, although to a lesser extent than material remains, include words connected with the Kosznajderian past. However, respondents admit that it is hard to identify such words and expressions, since they come so naturally to locals and are used in everyday speech. They include terms such as *durszlak*, *framuga* and *szlauch* (German-derived words meaning “colander”, “door-frame” and “hosepipe”).

In the context of the non-material cultural heritage, an important topic is that of the Kosznajderian clergy, who were part of the Pomeranian Catholic intelligentsia. Figures recalled by local residents include, first and foremost, the priests Dr Joseph Rink and Dr Paul Panske. The first, from Moszczenica, is known as the author of histories, memoirs and accounts of daily life relating to the Kosznajders (e.g. Rink 1930, 1932, 1933). Paul Panske, a Kosznajder from Granowo, was a member of both German and Polish scholarly societies. He researched, among other things, Kosznajderia’s history and Kosznajderian surnames (e.g. Panske 1910, 1933). Another frequently mentioned figure is Dr Jan Behrendt of Ogorzeliny, a scholar, a parish priest in Danzig (Gdańsk), and also a poet. A short volume of his poetry was published recently in Chojnice (Behrendt 2019). It is also interesting to note some women among the Kosznajderian intellectual class – for example, Maria Semrau gave a lecture at the university of Breslau (Wrocław) in 1915 (Semrau 1915).

Apart from the focus of local activity around the memory of significant figures in Kosznajderian communities, the exceptional character of the area is also based to a significant degree on values that refer to those communities. The popular phrase *fenomen tożsamości*, “phenomenon of identity”, which appears in many places referring to the Kosznajderian heritage, is explained by one leader as follows:

So the phenomenon of identity means that it is possible to preserve roots and identity by living somewhere. This is astonishingly important. You live in that society, you’re in touch with the society, and at the same time... we are not a closed enclave, but to preserve the Catholic religion in the neighbourhood... Christianity after all, but... for hundreds of years. This is a remarkable phenomenon, especially in such a small area. So these people were so connected with the place, with each other, with principles, with religion, I mean everything that is essential and important for a person. So they cultivated all of this (...) It was quality after all. Hence our interest in a piece of that region. Speaking about the development of an area, you first need to make an inventory of it. What we had in that place and what we have now. What is of value. (Female, 50–70, Chojnice, 13 March 2019)

The importance of promoting the area with reference to the Kosznajderian heritage is spoken of mostly by local leaders. In arguing for this, they refer to the particular features of that community, and allude to the outstanding qualities of the lands that are now settled by new inhabitants in the former Kosznajderian villages. The memory of the Kosznajders is an important element of what makes this area unique. The characteristics of that community mean that its heritage is not bland, but is (or might be) a significant element in strengthening the position of this subregion:

It is significant that there were such people in this area. Who stood out, contributed something to the area. Knowledge. They provided priests, clergy. Significant, very much so. (...) Things happened there. This is not some shallow history. It's a bit smarter (...) I believe that this tradition and history should be shown, every region has some history, there is no area that doesn't have. But this is cohesive, logical, positive, it brings value. So it's hard not to show off this area. (Female, 50–70, Chojnice, 13 March 2019)

The exceptional nature of today's Kosznajderia is said to lie above all in its uniqueness resulting from the configuration of social processes, including migration, and by the same token the creation of a specific cultural and social entity. This is evidenced by many statements made by residents:

This area (...) is the only place where we can speak of Kosznajderia, where there are borders, where we can speak about the people, the tradition, the clergy. (Female, 50–70, Ostrowite, 28 July 2019)

But this is certainly a phenomenon and it must be said that... Just that these people are really a kind of... a bit like a kind of Atlantis. The Pomeranian Atlantis, no? (Female, 30–50, Ciechocin, 1 August 2019)

Well, there is nature everywhere. However, where we have got to together, what distinguishes us as a region, that's Kosznajderia. (Female, 30–50, Ostrowite, 28 July 2019)

The Kosznajderian “boom” that began in the 1990s and became – or at least, was desired to become – a distinguishing characteristic of the subregion is associated by respondents with broader sociocultural changes leading to strengthened regionalist movements, and also with emerging structural opportunities for supporting local development, above all in the form of opportunities to obtain outside funds (mainly from the European Union). The intensification of “work” on heritage and identity in relation to Kosznajderia reveals the potential of this subregion in the context of multifaceted local development. This is recognised both by many regional and local leaders, and by residents. Although the emphasis in local initiatives relating to Kosznajderia is often on strengthening identity or integrating the people of the area, the topic

is received largely in terms of image-building potential, rather directed towards the outside. On the other hand, undertakings focused on regional history enjoy great interest among residents, and the cultural activity of the subregion is largely based on such issues.

After analysing the whole of the empirical material collected in the course of this research, one can conclude that, despite noticing many barriers and problems the respondents – both leaders and residents – also see potential, above all in internal resources: the cultural heritage associated to a large extent with the Kosznajderian culture and the particular cultural mosaic of post-war settlement. The research has also shown that residents are highly interested and active in initiatives related to the regional and local cultural heritage, and that the communities have active leaders who concentrate a significant part of their activity on those questions. To a large degree, however, the cultural heritage of this area requires a filling out of content, on the one hand by way of historical research and publications and their popularisation, and on the other through a discussion concerning identity, in which local residents should be involved. After all, the process of describing, explaining and understanding the ambivalence relating to the Kosznajderian heritage is still under way and will certainly continue. It is necessary for the shaping of a regional or local identity, which has an impact on many areas of social and cultural life.

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Keywords: region, Kosznejderia, Kosznejder, Pomerania, identity, heritage

ABSTRACT

This article attempts to answer the question of the place of Kosznejderia and its former inhabitants in the contemporary heritage and identity of the part of Pomerania in which that German Catholic population lived. For more than a decade, the description of Kosznejderia as a “phenomenon of identity” has had a marked presence in the regional discourse. Based on material collected during field research (interviews, observations, and data analysis), it will be explained what is the state of this phenomenon today and how it is present in the subregion and in local communities. Kosznejderia and its former inhabitants are an important component of the nascent contemporary (sub)regional/local identity. The heritage of Kosznejderia is a significant element of the discourse on identity, in which the main emphasis is on the common features of former and current inhabitants, and the significance of material heritage. The agricultural character of these lands and the presence of Catholicism somehow link the past with the present. Because of the complex history of this area and its population, in particular the difficult Polish–German relations and the breach of historical, social and cultural continuity after the Second World War, contemporary processes related to identity are marked by certain ambivalences.