

The image of the spa town of Szczawno-Zdrój in light of the transformation of the city of Wałbrzych at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries

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Abstract: The focus of the article is to determine the impact of the industrial transformation of the city of Wałbrzych, which took place at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, on the image of the spa town of Szczawno-Zdrój. The paper discusses the growth of the city of Wałbrzych and its impact on the landscape and spa conditions of Szczawno-Zdrój. The article presents the main activities which change the nature, structure of industry and landscape of Wałbrzych and which affect the neighboring spa town and its cultural landscape. The article looks at how the transformations that took place in Wałbrzych at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries affected the spa activity of Szczawno-Zdrój.

Keywords: Wałbrzych, transformation, landscape

Introduction

The spa town of Szczawno-Zdrój and the adjacent city of Wałbrzych were developing alongside each other for many centuries. When Szczawno-Zdrój was in its prime in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was one of the most renowned spas in this part of Europe. Wałbrzych, which like Szczawno has a rich history, in the 17th century was a center of weaving, and, later, of the rapidly developing textile, glass, ceramics, coal mining, and coke industries. The dynamic development of black coal mining started in the mid-nineteenth century and lasted practically until the end of the 1980s. In 1896, due to an increase in the economic potential of Wałbrzych, its area started growing and this process of territorial development accelerated after World War I and continued in the second half of the 20th century. After 1950, adjacent housing estates were incorporated into the city and new housing estates were later developed so that the spa town of Szczawno became surrounded on three sides by the industrial city of Wałbrzych with over 100,000 inhabitants. Such a neighborhood had an increasing influence on the image and development of the Szczawno-Zdrój spa town.

Since the early 1990s, as a result of political and economic transformations, the image and landscape of the city of Wałbrzych have changed.

The aim of this study is to determine the effect of the transformation of the industrial city of Wałbrzych on the landscape of Szczawno-Zdrój, and on how it is perceived and judged. The research method consists in the analysis of the trend in changes in the landscape of Wałbrzych at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries and their impact on the image of Szczawno-Zdrój.

The Szczawno-Zdrój spa town

The year 1815 is considered as the beginning of organized spa activities. The investments, organizational changes and the appointment of a spa therapist allowed Szczawno-Zdroj (German: Bad Salzbrunn) to officially become a spa town [1, s. 352]. The dynamic development of this resort began in the mid-nineteenth century. It started to flourish after the nearby more popular spa town of Stary-Zdrój (currently a district of Wałbrzych) shut down its services in 1873 due to the disappearance of mineral springs caused by intensive mining operations at the neighboring Chwalibóg black coal mine. The town was not destroyed during the war and its spa buildings survived, including a wooden walking hall, wooden and brick pump room, a social house, a spa theater, a natural medicine center, and other spa facilities. After the war, they were used for therapeutic activities. What also remained were hotels and guesthouses, including the characteristic Grand Hotel.

Owing to the high standard of facilities and their good condition, it was possible for the spa town to quickly resume operation. In 1946, Szczawno (then Solice-Zdrój¹) admitted its first civilian patients [2, s. 99]. On July 1, 1945, Szczawno-Zdrój (then Solice-Zdrój) received municipal rights.



Fig. 1. Szczawno-Zdrój (photo by author).

Wałbrzych

The industrial city of Wałbrzych, Szczawno-Zdroj's neighbor, started developing dynamically at the beginning of the 19th century, i.e. at the same time when Szczawno reached its peak of development. With the development of industry, starting from 1896, the city grew by developing the surrounding areas and spreading into the neighboring housing estates². This spatial development also continued after World War II. The city limits were expanded to include, among others, the nearby towns of Sobiecin and Biały Kamień to the west, Poniatów and Rusinowa to the east, as well as the Lubiechów and Książ estates located to the north of Szczawno-Zdrój. In these new areas located to the north of Szczawno, new housing estates of Piaskowa Góra and Podzamcze were built in the 1960s and the late 1970s respectively. As a result of this long-term process, the spa town of Szczawno-Zdroj and, above all, its therapeutic facilities, became surrounded on the south, east and north by

1 The first name of the town, used to the end of 1946.

2 cf. Ludwig B., 2017, *Czy małe miasto może zmienić się w duże? Analiza przypadku Wałbrzycha w drugiej połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku*. Space-Society-Economy, vol. 52, no 4, pp. 5–24.

the buildings of Wałbrzych. In 1991, Wałbrzych reached its peak population of over 141 000 residents. Since then, the number of inhabitants has been systematically decreasing.

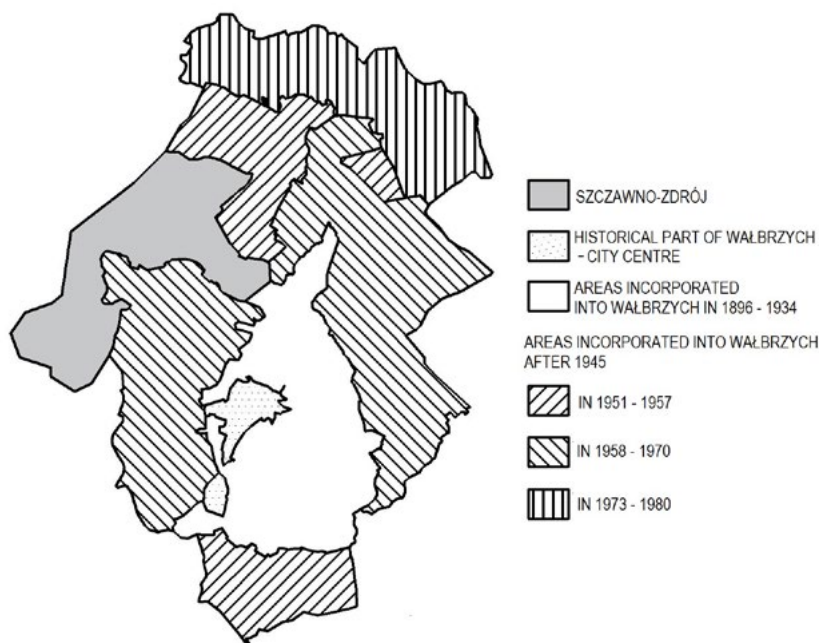


Fig. 2. Urban growth of Wałbrzych after 1945 (author's study based on a map by Ilona Jaworska based on the cartographic collections of the Museum in Wałbrzych and archival materials of the Spatial Planning Office in Wałbrzych.

The cultural landscape of Szczawno-Zdrój in contrast to the landscape of Wałbrzych

The spatial development of Wałbrzych and Szczawno is largely determined by the terrain. Wałbrzych is located in a valley with numerous hills, surrounded by the Wałbrzyskie mountains. This is similar to the spa town of Szczawno-Zdrój which is located at the foot of the Chelmiec mountain (851 m a.s.l.) in the Szczawnik stream valley and surrounded by hills.

Both places are separated by the forested Parkowa Mountain, also known as Gediminas' Hill. This type of terrain combined with a favorable direction of prevailing winds blowing over Szczawno-Zdrój (from the west and north), to some extent, protected the spa for years against air pollution produced by industrial plants located mainly in the southern, industrial part of Wałbrzych [3, s.352]. However, given the proximity of the two cities, all these favorable circumstances did not completely protect Szczawno-Zdrój from the effects of Wałbrzych's plants.

The main result of the city's economic growth and its developing burdensome industry was higher environmental pollution, caused not only by fumes from factories and coke batteries but also from waste heaps and landfills. This pollution affected both the area of the city and of the nearby region.

In the second half of the 20th century, two large housing estates were built in Wałbrzych, in the area to the north and northeast of Szczawno. As a result, one of the main communication routes that ran from north to south through the center of Szczawno started functioning as an alternative road connecting these housing estates with the districts of Biały Kamień and running further towards the city center. Heavy traffic started to produce noise, pollute the air with engine exhaust and bring about other undesirable phenomena.



Fig. 3. Grunwaldzki Square in the 1980s – the center of Wałbrzych. (photo by author)

Over the many years of their parallel development, Wałbrzych and Szczawno became mutually connected in several ways, which was especially apparent in the second half of the 20th century. Wałbrzych became a commercial, economic and administrative base for the spa. Szczawno-Zdrój became more than a weekend recreation area for the residents of Wałbrzych.

As the built development in these two locations spreads in many directions, it becomes interconnected and overlaps, sometimes making it difficult to notice the boundaries between Wałbrzych and Szczawno.

Despite this close relationship, Szczawno has retained its uniqueness in terms of the scale and character of its buildings.



Fig. 4. The landscape of Szczawno-Zdrój. Wałbrzych's Biały Kamień housing estate is visible in the background. (photo by author)

However, one of the consequences of Wałbrzych's growth was the surrounding of the area of Szczawno-Zdrój, which in turn caused the traditional cultural landscape of the spa town to become "overshadowed" by the landscape of Wałbrzych and all the effects resulting from the activities of this prominent industrial center.

When viewing Szczawno from the surrounding hills, one can see a spa landscape set against the background of apartment blocks and housing estates of Wałbrzych districts, which upsets the traditional landscape of the town. [4, s. 37–44].



Fig. 5. The landscape of Szczawno-Zdrój. Wałbrzych's Podzamcze housing estate is visible in the background. (photo by author)

The image of the town, which had been largely shaped by its historic spa buildings and landscape values, started to be seen through the prism of the polluted, smoky, and troublesome city of Wałbrzych. Such was the image that was recorded in the memory of tourists, particularly in the last decades of the late 20th century, which diminished the popularity of this spa town.



Fig. 6. View of downtown Wałbrzych. The turn of the 1960s and 1970s. (source: fotopolska.eu/Walbrzych/b8244,Dzielnica_Srodmiestcie.html, accessed on 01.10.19)

The “new” image of Wałbrzych in the landscape of Szczawno-Zdrój

Wałbrzych started to change at the beginning of the 1990s. The character of the city and its landscape changed. The political and economic transformations led to the closing of mines, coking plants and most of the onerous industrial plants. The city's industry structure changed. The quality of air over Wałbrzych and the region changed. Already in the 1990s (largely as a result of the restructuring of Wałbrzych's industry) dust pollution in Szczawno was significantly reduced to a level that was acceptable by the spa town. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Wałbrzych has undertaken many projects aimed at rebuilding and organizing subsequent parts of its built development. The projects also include the modernization of road infrastructure. For Szczawno-Zdrój, the most promising investment is the recently started construction of Wałbrzych western bypass which will connect the northern residential districts with the city center, bypassing Szczawno-Zdrój.



Fig. 7. “Stara Kopalnia” (Old Mine) in the landscape of Wałbrzych. (photo by author).



Fig. 8. The center of Wałbrzych. (photo by author)

Wałbrzych is changing its image from an industrial, polluted and troublesome neighbor, to a modern, industrial agglomeration that is just as committed to protecting the environment as to industrial production. Wałbrzych is focusing on tourism development. New landscape values related to the city's location and surroundings are being discovered.

In 2014, the city of Wałbrzych completed the revitalization of its largest mine "Julia" (formerly "Thorez") and in its place opened the Stara Kopalnia (Old Mine) Science and Art Center, which has become one of the most popular tourist attractions in Poland related to postindustrial facilities.

Although Wałbrzych is still a large industrial city, all these activities and processes that have taken place since the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries have made its landscape more "friendly" for the spa town of Szczawno. The favorable trend in changes to the landscape and the character of the city offers the opportunity to restore the objectively high value of Szczawno's cultural image, without negative references to the "former" landscape of Wałbrzych.

Summary

With its hundreds of years of history, Szczawno-Zdrój is a spa town that still remembers its former splendor. In many respects, it is an exceptional spa town with impressive spa facilities, beautiful parks, and green areas. The landscape of this spa has been preserved over the years and does not change much. The single – and multi-family houses that were built after the war in areas located at a distance from the spa facilities, have little impact on the traditional cultural landscape of this spa town. However, the neighboring industrial city of Wałbrzych, especially during the last decades of the 20th century, affected the conditions in the spa town, which made people see and judge this beautiful spa through the prism of this close neighbor. The richness of the spa town's architecture and its great landscape values were obscured by these often-repeated opinions.

Wałbrzych started to change in the early 1990s. Since then the city has been going through transformations. As a result of economic changes, mines, coking plants and businesses related to the coal industry were closed. The coal industry has been replaced by the ceramics, mineral resource and automotive industries. An important trend in the city's development is tourism, which is stimulated by the city's location near the Książ Landscape Park, the Wałbrzyskie Mountains with the peak Chelmiec (851 m a.s.l.), the Stone Mountains and the Owl Mountains. The "Old Mine" Science and Art Center located in the former "Julia" ("Thorez") mine has become one of the biggest attractions of post-industrial tourism in Poland.

In terms of culture and tourism, the industrial Wałbrzych with its surroundings is becoming an attractive city for the patients of Szczawno-Zdrój.

As a result of the urban restructuring of Wałbrzych, there was a large drop in atmospheric particulate matter throughout the region. The period of economic changes has had a beneficial effect on air sanitation, which is evidenced by the amount of particulates in the air in Sudeten spas which has remained within limits for many years [5, s. 114–124].

This changing image of Wałbrzych offers the opportunity to look at the landscape of Szczawno-Zdrój in a broad context, not only of the city itself but also of its immediate surroundings. This, one of the oldest Sudeten spas, has a chance to increase its popularity, restore its former splendor and break free from the long-lasting opinion about the spa's landscape as seen through the prism of its troublesome neighbor.

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