

Residential buildings in healthcare resort Szczawno-Zdroj in the second-half of 20th century

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Abstract: The article focuses on the development of housing in Szczawno-Zdroj in the second half of the twentieth century. The image of this place was shaped for centuries as the town and the spa located in this area developed and mainly consisted of facilities associated with health resorts.

Based on an analysis of how housing developed in the discussed period, regarding both the shape of buildings and their location on the city plan, the author determines the degree to which new buildings interfere with the existing infrastructure with particular emphasis on their impact on the image of the historical part of the city which is mainly shaped by spa facilities. The study analyzed the impact of residential housing of this period on the traditional cultural landscape of Szczawno-Zdroj.

Keywords: Szczawno Zdroj, health resort, residential buildings.

Introduction

Szczawno-Zdroj is one of eleven Lower Silesian spa towns located in the Sudeten mountains and Sudeten foothills¹. The health-giving properties of local mineral waters were known for centuries and they became the basis for the medicinal services of the spa town. Such services have been offered for many centuries despite the changing political and economic conditions. Throughout the years, the town of Szczawno-Zdroj and the spa in it have undergone constant development. Due to the prevailing climatic conditions, the neighboring green areas and the spa nature of the town itself, these areas have become attractive residential areas. After World War II, a more dynamic development of housing in Szczawno-Zdroj took place from the mid-sixties to the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. This period was dominated by single-family housing. The new buildings were added into the existing urban fabric and became a permanent part of it.

The purpose of this article is to answer the following question: To what extent has the contemporary housing development built in the second half of the twentieth century changed the image of the spa town and spa of Szczawno-Zdroj.

The Szczawno-Zdroj spa town

Szczawno-Zdroj is a well-known Lower Silesian spa town with hundreds of years of history. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries it was one of the most renowned spas, not only in the Sudeten area. No detailed or documented information exists regarding the origins of the use of Szczawno springs for medicinal purposes. According to legends and unconfirmed stories, the local healing waters were known already in the early centuries of the current era. Such information can be deduced from archeological excavations carried out in the

¹ Act of 28 July 2005 on Health Resorts, Spas and Spa Conservation Areas and on Spa Gminas.

years 1907–12. However, this has not been confirmed by other studies. The first written record of this place dates back to a document from 1221 which mentions a settlement called Solikowo, also known as Salzborn, as a geographical reference point, and indicates the villages surrounding it as a model for the founding of the Budzów village near Ząbkowice [1][2]. This early settlement mentioned in the document is considered the beginning of today's Szczawno. A historical reference to this settlement is the first post-war name of today's Szczawno-Zdroj, i.e. Solice-Zdroj, which was used until the end of 1946.

At the beginning of the 19th century the spa town clearly starts to develop along with the growing interest in health resorts in Europe. The contemporary owner of Szczawno, Count Hans Heinrich VI von Hochberg from the nearby Książ, initiated the transformation of the spa village into a modern European resort. The year 1815 is considered as the beginning of organized spa activities. The investments and organizational changes (including the appointment of a spa therapist) allowed Szczawno-Zdroj to officially become a spa town [3].

The year 1873 is a landmark date in the history of the Szczawno resort, when the nearby spa town of Stary-Zdroj (currently a district of Wabrzych with the same name) shut down its services. In this year, as a result of intensive mining operations at a neighboring coal mine, the last of the local mineral springs disappeared. Until then, Szczawno-Zdroj, despite its steady development, had been in the shadow of the more popular Stary-Zdroj. In 1873 about 40 publications were issued about Szczawno and its mineral waters, excluding press articles [4]. In the period following these events, which ended when World War II broke out, the spa town reached its peak of development and became famous in Europe.



Fig. 1. Walking route in the central part of the spa town. Photo by author

The spa activities were resumed in the new postwar reality, within different Polish borders and in a new political and economic situation. On July 1, 1945, the town received municipal rights.

In many respects, Szczawno-Zdroj is an exceptional spa town. The city is located amidst rolling hills at the foot of the Chelmiec mountain, and is surrounded by lush parks and forests. From the other side, it neighbors the industrial Walbrzych with a population of over 100,000. For many centuries the spa town and the industrial center were developing alongside each other. This closeness to the unpleasant Walbrzych influenced the functioning of the spa town throughout their entire shared history. The spa town became practically surrounded on three sides by the city of Walbrzych, which was developing in the second half of the 20th century, as well as by new housing estates and the historical part of the city. The proximity of a large industrial center had negative consequences both for the spa services and the image of this place as a neighbor of a big industrial city. After the closure of coking plants, mines and other undesirable industrial facilities, today's Walbrzych is a much "friendlier" neighbor but also much larger, both in area and population. Despite such a location, Szczawno-Zdroj has maintained its independence and distinctiveness in terms of the scale and character of its buildings.

Szczawno-Zdroj stands out among other spa towns with its unique layout and architecture of spa facilities. It is well-known for its large wooden walking hall, wooden and brick pump room, a spa house (formerly a social house) and a spa theater with exceptional interiors, all of which are located in a single row of buildings along the main avenue of the spa park. These facilities are popular attractions of the spa town, its showcase and the main elements shaping the cultural landscape of this place. Most of the buildings in Szczawno-Zdroj, including spa facilities, were built in the 19th century and in the first decades of the 20th century.

It is dominated by sparsely located buildings, mainly villas, guesthouses and other residential buildings, all of which share some features. The buildings have two to four floors with steep, multi-pitched roofs, partly with mansard roofs, covered with tiles. Many buildings have decorative elements in their wooden structure, porches, balconies and other decorations [5]. Some of the residential buildings built in the 1920s and 1930s have an Art Nouveau decor.

Similarly to other Lower Silesian spa towns, Szczawno was not significantly damaged during World War II.

Just as the Grand Hotel, the "Baths" building (now the Natural Medicine Institute) erected in 1938 was, in those times, considered the most modern buildings of this type in the Sudeten area. Owing to the good condition of the entire spa infrastructure after World War II and their high standard it was possible to quickly resume operation after the war. Already in 1946, the first patients came to Szczawno-Zdroj. Most of the "pre-war" spa facilities offer spa treatments to this day.

New development in the area of Szczawno-Zdroj after 1945

Practically until the 1960s the town did not have any new buildings. In the first decades after the war most of the activities focused on making use of the existing infrastructure.

The Szczawno-Zdroj spa town is an attractive place of recreation and leisure both for patients and local residents. Starting from the 1960s, more and more people from the neighboring communities, especially residents of the industrial and "polluted" Wałbrzych, started viewing the spa town as an attractive place to live in due to its landscape and climate. At the end of the 1960s Szczawno-Zdroj saw a boom in private housing, which peaked in the 1970s and 1980s. This process continued in the following years, but on a much smaller scale. The 21st century brought with it small-scale multi-family housing, in the form of individual buildings and small residential complexes.

The 1960s and early 1970s were not very conducive to the development of individual single-family housing. The same situation occurred in Szczawno-Zdroj. The construction of houses was subject to numerous limitations, mainly regarding maximum usable space of the building and maximum plot area. These limits, especially in the initial period, virtually eliminated any originality from proposed solutions. Additionally, in those years, it was difficult to obtain building materials other than the basic assortment, which was only available in small quantities. Because of these circumstances in the late 1960s, but primarily in the 1970s and 1980s, the basic shape of a single-family building that met the requirements and made use of simplified construction technologies was a cube, also known as "the Polish cube", with characteristic flat, mono-pitched or hipped roofs. These types of buildings were preferred for private construction projects mainly due to economic reasons and practical implementation possibilities. Seeing them as examples of modernist design was rather an excuse for building difficulties than an actual implementation of real ideas of modernism.

The residential development built since the 1960s in Szczawno-Zdroj can be divided into two types. The first is "supplementary" development and includes buildings that are erected in the vicinity of already existing development. This approach was facilitated by the compactness of these cube-shaped buildings, making it possible to build them on small plots that often used to serve as gardens of other buildings. The second type is new, micro-estates, or rather housing complexes, built in previously undeveloped areas located within the city limits. There are several such clear clusters of new buildings in Szczawno-Zdroj. Since the area of large plots for potential investments within the existing development of Szczawno-Zdroj was limited, housing was mostly built in undeveloped space.

The aforementioned, dominant cube-shaped design of private housing projects, which was also prevalent in areas with exceptional, therapeutic qualities, is the symbol of that era and its methods of building single-family houses. It was the result of the possibility to use the available resources and of specific economic opportunities.

Later, in the 1980s and 1990s, in keeping with the general trends, the image of private housing projects started changing gradually, also in Szczawno-Zdrój. The traditional box-shaped buildings gradually disappeared from the landscape of newly-constructed buildings. The houses tended to have distinctive features. Steep roofs covered with tiles reappeared and the shapes of buildings were more diversified.



Fig. 2. Main private housing complexes in Szczawno-Zdrój. Edits made by author, map source: mapa.livecity.pl/miasto/Szczawno-Zdr%C3%B3j,0984574 (accessed on 25.06.2017)

1. Spa sanatorium no 1 (former Grand Hotel). 2. A complex of spa facilities – pump room, walking hall, spa house (White Room), spa theater.
3. Natural Medicine Center. A, B, C, – single-family housing complexes

The estates that were built over this period of several decades have a mixture of building shapes ranging from “cubes” to more individual forms. This diversity, which also resulted from the lack of clear guidelines for building shape design, often produced development with heterogeneous appearance. As a result of the urbanization process that began in the 1960s, Polish spa towns gradually ran out of investment plots and thus have lost the possibility to further develop the spas located in their area [6]. The formation of new buildings is, in a sense, a natural and unavoidable process in the the development of a given area, but if it is too intensive, it may result in the degradation of the cultural landscape and thus change the traditional image of the spa town.

Housing in the second half of the twentieth century in the city landscape

The historic buildings of Szczawno-Zdroj which have survived till today largely consisted of guesthouses, villas, hotels and residential development. After World War II, guesthouses and hotels were turned into sanatoria and holiday homes, among others, the pre-war Grand Hotel was converted into a spa sanatorium. A large part of the remaining buildings consist of detached single-family and multi-family homes. For years the layout of the spa part of the city has remained virtually unchanged. The few reconstructions of individual facilities made in the post-war years do not significantly change the image of the city. The current image of the spa part is the result of modernizations, especially those carried out since the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. In recent years such works included the renovation and reconstruction of the main walking routes in the spa, renovation of the square in front of the main sanatorium, thorough renovation of the spa theater (in the years 2008–2011) and many other investments that contribute to the contemporary image of the spa.

In the seventies and eighties, a period of intensive construction of single-family housing, the free plots in the vicinity of existing houses were filled with new residential development. The cube-shaped buildings stand out among the historical development. They are distinguished by flat roofs which are different than the traditional, steep roofs covered with tiles. Apart from the roof, their shapes and sizes do not differ significantly from those built earlier.



Fig. 3. Single-family homes – „cubes” among the existing development. Photo by author



Fig. 4. Single-family housing from years 70 of the 20th century (A – in Fig. 2). Photo by author



Fig. 5. Single-family housing complex (B – in Fig. 2). Photo by author



Fig. 6. Single-family housing complex (C – in Fig. 2). Photo by author

Szczawno-Zdrój is a town located in an attractive landscape, surrounded by hills and forests. A large part of the town is occupied by green areas with rich vegetation, including two English-style parks: the Spa park, near the spa part of the city and the Swedish park, whose area includes a recreational and residential part of the city.

The image of the city is also influenced by individually designed gardens and yards about the houses, which naturally blend into the characteristic landscape of the spa and are an important element of Szczawno-Zdrój development. The carefully maintained green areas surrounding the new development soften the differences between the shape of the new and traditional buildings.

The housing development from the seventies and eighties, which forms new urban complexes and mostly includes cube-shaped buildings, does not significantly differ from similar housing estates in other locations. It is difficult to find original solutions in the Szczawno estates that would correspond to the spa architecture or have purposely designed features of vernacular architecture. Residential building complexes created in the second half of the 20th century are concentrated in areas located outside the main spa part of town. Despite their high intensity, the scale of these buildings in relation to the historical development is not very large. They do not stand out in the landscape of the city and its spa part, which is mostly dominated by older historical buildings. Also, they do not influence how the city is perceived by patients, whose activities are concentrated in the central spa part of Szczawno-Zdrój.

Summary

The new housing development which was started in the late sixties in the spa town of Szczawno-Zdrój is a permanent element of the modern landscape of this spa. The appearance of buildings erected in the 1970s and 1980s reflects the typical principles and technologies related to the design of single-family houses, available nationwide at that time, and does not have any regional features that correspond to the design of buildings in the spa. The new buildings are visible in the city landscape, but mainly in individual streets and parts of the city that are distant from the central part of the spa, and they do not significantly change the cultural landscape of the resort. The traditional image of Szczawno-Zdrój mostly consists of historical buildings concentrated around the central part of the spa and directly related to spa services, as well as of other buildings in this section of the city. The intensive development of single-family housing in the 1970s and 1980s was largely stopped, not only by the shortage of investment plots but also as a result of the difficulties brought by structural changes that took place in the 1990s in the neighboring Wałbrzych as well as by the difficult economic situation in this region. In those years, its inhabitants largely contributed to the development of housing in the area of Szczawno-Zdrój. The second half of the twentieth century saw the development of private housing projects. Among the reasons why only these kinds of projects were built in this period and not multi-family houses could be the lack of demand for such investments in a town with only 6,000 residents, as well as the construction of large housing estates in Wałbrzych, which consumed the opportunities for the development of this form of housing in the surrounding areas. The final years of the twentieth century and the first decades of the twenty-first century brought an investment to Szczawno-Zdrój aimed at improving the existing development, modernizing and reconstructing some buildings, including those built after the war, and building multi-family houses, whose size and location does not compromise the traditional cultural landscape of the spa town of Szczawno-Zdrój.

The housing development built in the second half of the twentieth century in the spa town of Szczawno-Zdrój only marginally changes the cultural landscape of this place and does not compromise the traditional image of the spa. The location and shape of new buildings takes into account the scale of existing buildings and the unique spa nature of the city landscape.

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Zabudowa mieszkaniowa miejscowości uzdrowiskowej Szczawno-Zdrój drugiej połowy XX wieku

Streszczenie: Tematem artykułu jest kształtowanie się zabudowy mieszkaniowej na terenie Szczawna-Zdroju w II połowie XX wieku. Przez wiele wieków rozwoju miejscowości i uzdrowiska zlokalizowanego na tym obszarze, ukształtował się jego obraz, w znacznym stopniu zdeterminowany przez obiekty związane z lecznictwem uzdrowiskowym.

Na podstawie analizy sposobu kształtowania się zabudowy mieszkaniowej, powstałej w omawianym okresie, dotyczącej zarówno formy obiektów jak i ich lokalizacji na planie miasta określono stopień ingerencji nowej zabudowy w istniejącą infrastrukturę ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem jej wpływu na wizerunek historycznej części miasta kształtowanej głównie przez obiekty uzdrowiskowe. W pracy poddano analizie wpływ budownictwa mieszkaniowego tego okresu na tradycyjny krajobraz kulturowy Szczawna-Zdroju.

Słowa kluczowe: Szczawno-Zdrój, lecznictwo uzdrowiskowe, zabudowa mieszkaniowa
