

# Spatial transformations of Wrocław in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulting from the dismantling of municipal fortifications

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**Abstract:** The article focuses on the spatial development of Wrocław at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The paper discusses the causes and subsequent stages of the demolition of city fortifications and the effects of this project on the spatial development of Wrocław. The article describes the state of fortifications around Wrocław and the city plan after the demolition of city walls. The article discusses the importance of these activities for the development of Wrocław and for the increase in the standard of living of its residents.

**Keywords:** Wrocław, fortifications, spatial development

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## Introduction

At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Wrocław was, for the Prussian state, both a strategically important fortress and a city of craftsmen and merchants. This situation led to the fundamental contradiction between territorial development and constraints resulting from the ring of fortifications surrounding the city. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Prussian authorities continued to allocate significant financial resources to systematically develop the city fortifications. The capture of Wrocław by the Napoleonic army in January 1807<sup>1</sup>, marked the beginning of a very important stage of the city's spatial development [1, p. 1107] [2, p.184]. At the behest of Emperor Napoleon I, this Frederician fortress was to become an "open city" once the vast ring of fortifications around it had been demolished.

The aim of this study was to determine, based on the analysis of the literature of the subject and iconographic documents, the influence of military operations in the early nineteenth century on the spatial development of Wrocław.

## Dismantling of city fortifications

Napoleon made the decision to dismantle the fortification system even before the French troops captured Wrocław. During the occupation of the city, the magistrate commissioned Fryderyk Bogumił Endler, a Silesian engraver, to create a plan of Wrocław and its fortifications. At the end of 1807 the plan was ready [3, p. 184].

1 On January 7, 1807, the Napoleonic army captured Wrocław and stayed there until November 1808.

It showed the fortification system as it had existed before being dismantled (Fig. 1.). The process of demolishing the fortress initiated by the French was continued intermittently for the years that followed and the destruction of other works of military architecture lasted until 1838 [4, p. 32]. The detonations to bring down city walls began already on January 9, 1807 [1, p. 1108]. The Bastion of St. Job was destroyed along with nearby city walls (currently the area of ul. Slowackiego). Additionally, the embankments located at the Oławska Gate (currently the area at the intersection of ul. Podwale and ul. Oławska) were levelled. The earth excavated in the land leveling process was used to fill sections of the city moat (to change its course). Thus, the „inner city”<sup>2</sup> was connected with north-eastern and eastern suburbs around it. At the same time, the fortifications located near the Mikołajska Gate (the area of today’s pl. Jana Pawła) and at Kępa Mieszczkańska were being demolished. The wooden palisades surrounding the city were also systematically dismantled. Further demolitions included walls near the Sakwowy Bastion (now Wzgórze Partyzantów) and fortifications of the so-called Miedzymurze (bailey) located near the Świdnicka Gate [5, p. 120]. The earth from the dismantled fortifications was used to change the course of the moat, which in this section resembled its current shape. Thus the „inner city” was opened to the areas in the south.

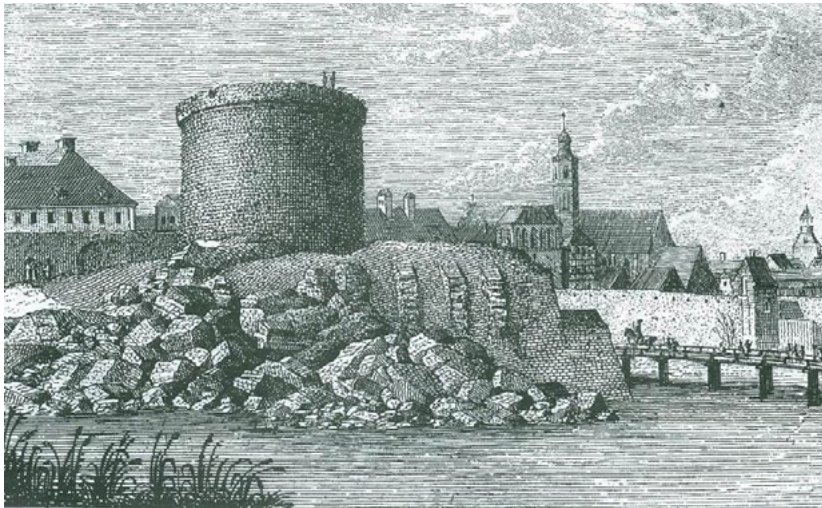


**Fig. 1.** Plan of the city of Wrocław and its fortifications. Engraving by F. B. Endler from 1807. (source: From the collection of A. Chądzyński) 1. Brama Mikołajska, 2. Brama Odrzańska, 3. Brama Frydryka, 4. Brama Ceglana, 5. Brama Oławska, 6. Brama Świdnicka.

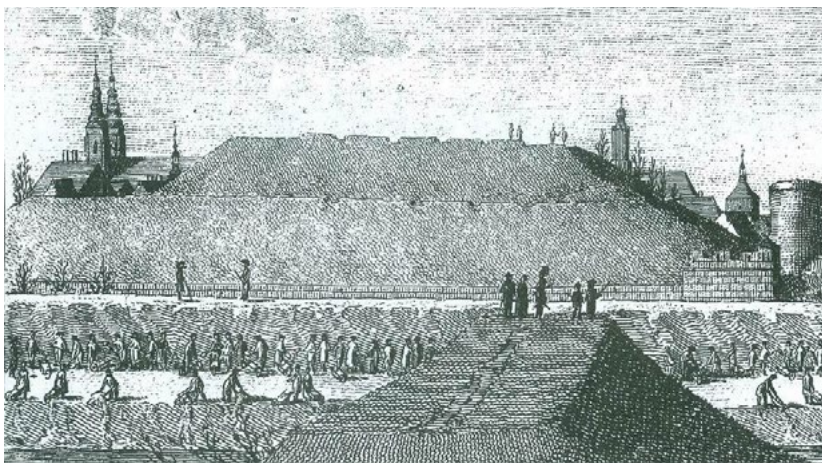
2 The term “inner city” refers to the part of the city that is surrounded by city walls.

In March 1807, demolition works were carried out and included the demolition of walls near Świdnicka Gate and the ravelin located in front of it. The works gained pace due to the maneuvers of Bavarian regiments planned by Prince Jérôme Bonaparte to be carried out on Wygon Świdnicki. The military parade that followed the military exercise was to take place on a specially prepared square. A decision was reached to locate it in front of the Świdnicka Gate. Due to the above, J. Blein, a colonel of French military engineers marked a square-shaped plaza with a length of 140 meters in the northern part of Świdnicki Wygon [1, p. 1108] (currently pl. T. Kościuszki). There were two intersecting traffic routes across the square, running from east to west and from north to south. The adopted spatial solution was a clear reference to Place Royale located in Paris. In the middle of May 1807, the Psi Bastion and the crownwork of Brama Mikołajska were finally dismantled. The last demolition made by the French in 1807 was the destruction of the crownwork and casemates located near the Collegiate Church of the Holy Cross [5, p. 122] (today's area between ul. Sienkiewicza and Na Szańcach). The demolition work had clearly slowed down by the end of the occupation of Wrocław by the Napoleonic army [6, p. 320]. Systematic demolition of the remaining fortifications did not take place until 1813. It is estimated that these works were completed around 1838 [4, p. 32].

The destruction of the fortifications was depicted in the drawings by Fryderyk Bogumił Endler which he made in the first decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while they were being demolished. They constitute important iconographic material and even the author thought of them as photographs and called them "Aufnahmen"<sup>3</sup> [2, p. 191].



**Fig. 2.** Ruins of the Olawska Gate. Engraving by F. B. Endler (source: <https://fotopolska.eu/642901,foto.html>, access: 09.2018)



**Fig. 3.** Demolition of the Sakwowy Bastion. Engraving by F. B. Endler (source: <https://fotopolska.eu/642894,foto.html>, access: 09.2018)

3 Endler's engravings were made on the basis of drawings made from observation.



**Fig. 4.** View of the Odrzańska Gate from the city and the fire of Przedmieście Odrzańskie. Engraving by F. B. Endler (source: From the collection of A. Chądzyński)

## Spatial development of the city

Many inhabitants of Wrocław in that era thought that Napoleon's decision to demolish the city fortifications was right and beneficial for the city<sup>4</sup>.

The day when the demolition of the wide ring of fortifications around Wrocław started is considered a breakthrough in the history of the city's spatial development. City fortifications were a barrier to its development. Without military structures the urban tissue could spread freely. The new stage of Wrocław's development was also boosted by the decisions of the Prussian King Frederick William III to donate the areas of the former fortress to the city in September 1808 [6, p. 321]. The formerly fortified area of the so-called "Jumping Star" located on the right-hand-side bank of the Odra River, also known as the "Polish" side, was donated to the city by the emperor under the condition that it must be transformed into a botanical garden.

For five subsequent years, the military authorities made it difficult to acquire the areas of the former fortress. However, the unresolved issues regarding the ownership of this area did not hinder important territorial decisions. Under the municipal ordinance of 19 November 1808, five suburban areas were formally added to the city: Świdnickie, Mikołajskie, Odrzańskie, Oławskie and Piaskowe [5, p. 126][6, p. 321]. A new form of production organization was another factor that contributed to their rapid development. Initially it consisted of craft production and later included factories.

The destruction caused by war and the resulting devastation of suburbs, as well as the difficult economic and military situation did not prevent the city from adding these areas. The municipal ordinance and the destruction of fortifications contributed to the expansion of the "inner city" area to include five suburbs. Thus the urban agglomeration of Wrocław was created and its area increased from 133 ha to 2064 ha [5, p. 126]. The suburbs were deprived of their separate legal capacity of only in 1816. The dismantled city gates made it possible to widen the traffic routes between the "inner city" and the added areas. Oławska Gate was dismantled in February 1814, Odrzańska Gate in October 1814, Świdnicka Gate in September 1815 and Piaskowa Gate ceased to exist in 1816. The Mikołajska Gate was probably dismantled at the beginning of 1822 [5, p. 127].

The areas of the former fortress located within the "inner city" were organized and then transformed into boulevards, parks and green areas. In 1812 the construction of the city promenade began in these areas. The

4 Such opinion can be found, among others, in the periodical *Der Breslauisch Erzähl* from September 3, 1808.

zoning plan was prepared by Jan Fryderyk Knor, municipal building counselor and Maurycy Eichborn [4, p. 33]. The partially dismantled Sakwowy Bastion and the Ceglany Bastion were transformed into viewpoints.

The inhabitants of Wrocław were proud of the new promenade.

It was adjoined by private residences and gardens, located on the outer side of the moat. They included a wide strip of the Oławskie, Świdnickie and Mikołajskie suburbs and a slightly narrower strip of the Odrzańskie and Piaskowe suburbs. Such developed areas are depicted on the plan from 1853. (Fig. 5)

This compact area of greenery, which the city had lacked before, has become the favorite place for Wrocław residents to rest and go for walks.



**Fig. 5.** Plan of the city of Wrocław by Carl Studt from 1853. (source: From the collection of A. Chądryński)

## Summary

The dismantling of city fortifications was a pivotal moment in the history of Wrocław's spatial development. Until this period, the city was enclosed in a small area by a ring of fortifications and thus could not expand territorially, whereas the suburbs outside the city walls developed in a chaotic manner and without a clear plan. The siege of the city during the war at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a difficult stage in the history of Wrocław. The decision to dismantle the fortifications made at the behest of Napoleon I was welcomed by many residents. Not only did the city gain the much needed green recreational areas, which were established on the areas of former fortifications, but it also made city ventilation more efficient and spatial development possible. The added suburbs gradually became an integral part of the rapidly growing urban agglomeration.

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