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Yacht Trip to the Centre of Szczecin

Abstract: Szczecin is located in the vicinity of water areas, which cover more than 24% of land within the city borders. Among many forms of tourism, one deserves special attention, namely the nautical tourism, which could take place at the open sea waters, on lakes, and inland waterways, which are plentiful in Szczecin and its surroundings. According to such location, the city boasts many of the seemingly undiscovered secrets. Corners of the city, which cannot be reached by any means of transportation, are accessible only from the water making these places unique and attractive tourist destination. We will go back in time to the 19th century city of Szczecin, where time stopped.

Key words: Szczecin, Water tourism, 19th century harbour city

Introduction

Water tourism, including sailing, is one of the most popular forms of tourism and recreation. For many participants in this form of leisure time, this is a unique opportunity to experience unusual emotions. It is one of the most enjoyable ways to relax and explore the landscape – a great form of kneading resourcefulness and ingenuity in organizing life surrounded by nature. Activity on the water is identified with youthful way and life style, and its element – sport (sailing) is treated as a synonym for youth. More often reveals itself as a form of leisure activity. Numerous Szczecin water areas are an ideal choice for all those who are just starting their adventure with water tourism or those who “swallowed the bug”.

Szczecin is located in the historical centre of Pomerania, a cross-border region of Western Pomerania. It lies in the north-western part of Poland at the mouth of the Oder River. The city covers an area of 300 km²; however 41% of this space is occupied by green areas and 24% by water.

Within the town, there is the Dąbie Lake, which actually is the only lake in the country where seagoing yachts can be moored. Several rivers flow through the city, the largest of

which is the Oder River. Among many forms of tourism, one deserves special attention, namely nautical tourism, which could take place at many types of water reservoirs: open sea waters, lakes, and inland waterways both in Szczecin and in its surroundings. Despite existing national border along the Oder river between Poland and Germany, the terrain and natural landscape of the region provide a convenient and easy way for navigation through the waterways.

Szczecin is divided into 4 major districts: North, West, Downtown and Prawobrzeże (‘The Right Bank’) [1]. Most of attractions at land and water area are located in the Downtown. Looking at Szczecin from the air it is easier to see picturesque lakes: Dąbie and Głębokie, and rivers: Odra, Regalica, Parnica, Płonia, as well as multiple canals with numerous water sports centers. Picturesque regatta course, canoe trails, and marinas are waiting for tourists.

Most of Szczecin marinas (6 of 10 existing) are located in the southern part of Dąbie Lake, on Prawobrzeże. The journey to the centre of 400,000 urban agglomeration to the forgotten corners of Szczecin begins from this place.

What makes it unique in the location of forgotten areas of Szczecin is that they are one of the most interesting examples of old industrial buildings in Szczecin (fig. 1).

Here were located companies associated with food production, the products of which were well known in all Germany. At the same time, the Columbus street is associated with rail

transport to these days. In Poland, these are the only 19th and 20th century industrial buildings situated just next to the river, and are available to sightseeing from water and land side. Moreover, Szczecin is the only Polish city where you can sail in the city centre, and the only city which you can reach by water from the depths of Europe and then go to the Baltic Sea.

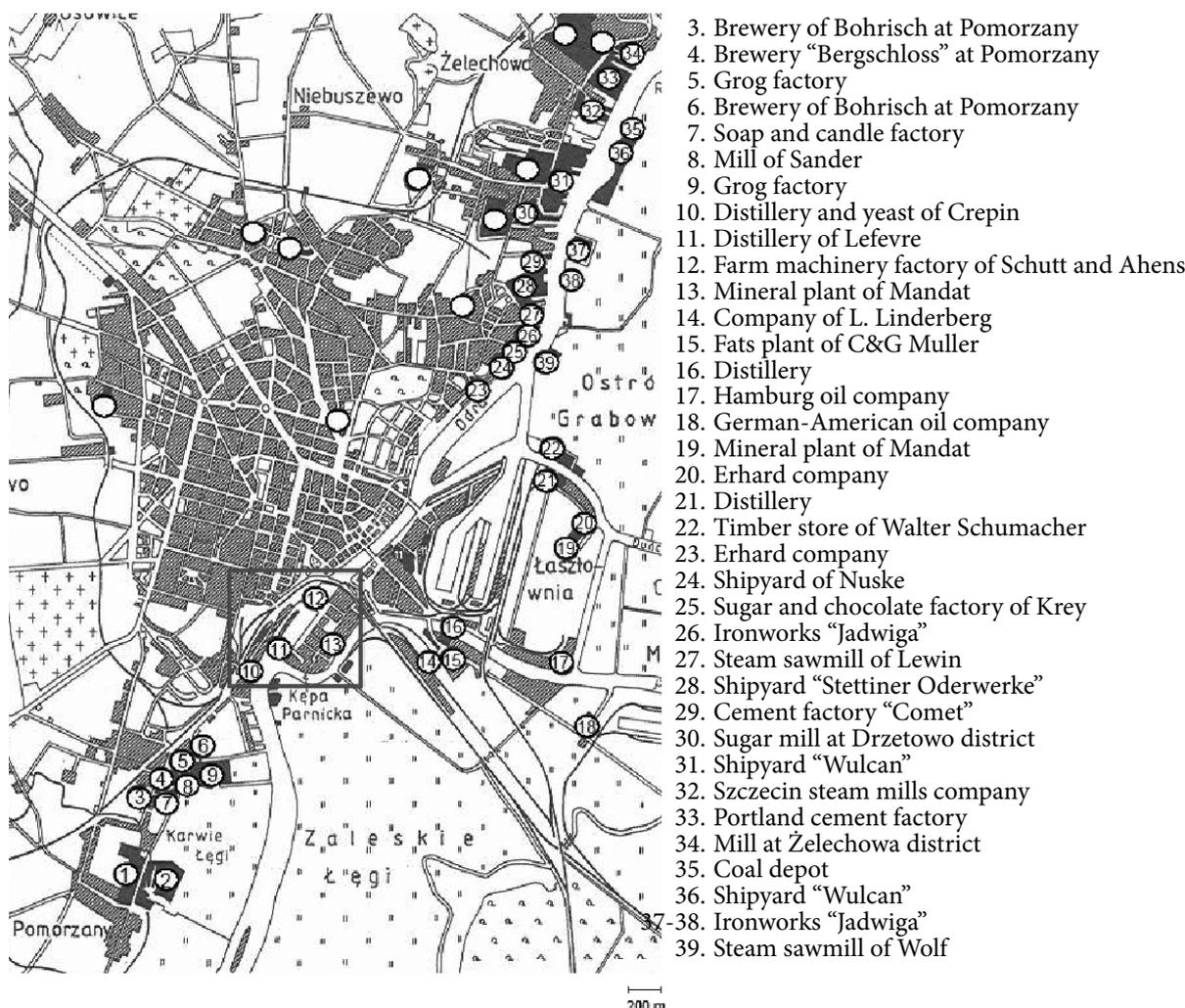


Fig. 1. Map of the industrial buildings in the centre of Szczecin along the Oder river
 Source: own work based on *Encyklopedia Szczecina*, t. II

Water Route to the Centre of Szczecin

Areas to the north of the Clowy Bridge (Toll Bridge) over Oder river and Długi Bridge (Long Bridge) over the Regalica river are all public water areas of the city, with land and water attractions. There are no hydraulic barriers, canals are navigable for all vessels, be it canoes, motor boats, yachts, passenger ships – cruisers, hydrofoils, and barges. One can have a look at facilities operating before the Second

World War, e.g. industrial plants: shipbuilding, cement, paper, sugar, lumber mills, steel mills, some of which function to this day. Shores are occupied by marinas for passenger ships, cargo handling space for ships, workshops, repair yards, power stations, gas stations, etc. Cruise ships sail along islands and the port area. These are internal waterways.

Areas south of the Cłowy and Długi bridges are rarely used for sailing, so they are unexplored and more natural. It is difficult to freely move tall ships around here. These limitations are the result of post-WW2 constructions like the bridges over the Oder and Regalica, which actually becomes an advantage as they survived as virgin corners of Szczecin, both natural and architectural. Cruise ships do not operate here, and land side trails do not reach this part of the city either. It is a pity because factory buildings at the Oder river, at the Columbus street, are the so-called “Venice of Szczecin”. This is one of the most beautiful places in the city centre, which is the purpose of the trip.

Szczecin is a city where not only religious and residential buildings were constructed and implemented with special reverence. The city also has such gems as factory buildings at the Odra river on the Columbus and Chmielewski Streets. These include: gasworks buildings, old yeast mills, and especially those buildings on the banks of the Oder river, which form the so-called “Venice of Szczecin”. We will only

move through the area of inland waterways (fig. 2). The entire route is full of memorabilia of the time presenting the largest and fastest economic growth.

Start from marinas on Dąbie Lake, passing Dąbska stream turn left towards the Cłowy Bridge (Toll Bridge) (fig. 2 [1]) on Regalica river (5.43 m clearance above water surface) [2]. The name comes from a custom bridge located here, where the toll was collected for the entry to Szczecin. In the 16th century it was dominated by a huge tower, which was pulled down in 1723. During years 1909-1911 Municipality of Szczecin built a draw bridge with a length of 195 m. The bridge was destroyed in 1945 and rebuilt in 1947 as a temporary structure with wooden supports. A new bridge was brought back into service in the same location (fig. 2 [1]) in 1960, whereas another new bridge in close proximity to the Cłowy Bridge (fig. 2 [2]), is called The Pioneers of Szczecin Bridge, and opened in 2003. It is 535 meters long, with 7 meters clearance above water surface, and is located at 737th km of Oder River.



Fig. 2. Water route to the “Venice of Szczecin”

Source: own work based on www.zumi.pl

Passing Siedlińska Kępa on the left, we find the ruins of the destroyed railway bridge pillars on Regalica line, which ran until 1945 from the Central Railway Station in Szczecin by Pucka Island and Zdroje and to the station in Dąbie and Stargard (fig. 2 [3]). On the right side we see icebreakers’ harbour. Before the Brynecka Gulf, looking out to the left of the entrance to a 0.5 km canal, which was the body of the

defunct cement plant – Portland Zement Stettiner Fabrik “Stern” – operating in Zdroje since 1862 (Fig. 2 [4]). Raw materials were mined from the pit, which after the flooding formed a lake called “Szmaragdowe” (Emerald) (fig. 2 [4]).

At 735 km of the Oder, we reach two more bridges called I Armii Wojska Polskiego (First Polish Army) and Gryfitów (House of Gryfits)

(5.96 m clearance above water surface) [2] along the street known as Poznan Highway. This bridge replaced in 1972 another wooden structure (fig. 2 [5]) based on the pillars of the German original bridge destroyed during WW II (length 233.4 m [5]).

Next we pass the railway drawbridge at Regalica river (2.96 m clearance) [2] which is the only active drawbridge in Poland (fig. 2 [6]). Built in 1936, it was destroyed during WW II and later rebuilt in 1948. During the shipping season it is raised up even 10 times a day. [6]

On the right we pass the mouth of the Canal Forest (Odyniec), which in the 1980s functioned as a rowing regatta course. Next we reach the drift Klucz-Ustowo at 731 km. It is a navigable canal with a length of 2.7 kilometres, where we meet the West Oder just 30 km from its East Oder fork.

Sailing to the north at 31 km on the right side we see the Lido Dziewoklicz (fig. 2 [7]), which before WW2 was one of the most visited sites in Szczecin [7]. This land was leased by the City Council of Szczecin to Hirsh, a merchant

who was trying to set up a potassium factory. Due to the lack of raw materials the factory went bankrupt, but the remaining ruins of the docking canal are still used by canoeists (Forest Canal). In the southern part of the Forest Canal in its impact to the Odra, a large municipal swimming pool was created in the 1960s.

Next to Dziewoklicz and to Poznan Highway, we flow under the Świerczewski bridge/Pomeranians bridge (11.86 m clearance) [2]. The history of its creation is the same as that of First Polish Army/House of The Gryfits bridge. Located on the railway embankment it was constructed in 1923 at the same height on the Regalica river (fig. 2 [8]).

At 32 km we pass Krainka island (fig. 2 [9]), where on the south bank there was a long rowing school. Before WW1, engineers were taught here. At the end of the 20th century there was also a fishing harbour and a marina belonging to the University Sports Association (Akademicki Związek Sportowy). On the left side we can see a sewage treatment plant.

City Centre Viewed from the Water – “Venice of Szczecin”

At 33 km we enter the centre of Szczecin, where visitors can see the first residential buildings fall into the water, so called “Venice of Szczecin”. Factory buildings of red brick from the early 20th century also stand on the water. Above the town, towers of the tallest buildings dominate the cityscape. A construction of reinforced concrete resembling a lighthouse greets from afar every ship flowing into Szczecin from the south. This “carbon tower” (fig. 2 [10]) is an architectural accent to this day reminding of a time when gas was produced from coal. City gasworks of Szczecin was built between 1846-1848 by the Dresden Blochman company. The plant operated until 1944, when gas production was finally stopped by air raids [8].

On the right side of the navigable route, in the place of the former shipyard there are long and wide rails falling into the water. This is a historic slip for launching boats. The development of industry in the whole agglomeration of Szczecin had mainly affected the position of the estuary of the Oder river and a high degree of urbanization enabling the location and

development of industrial production of high complexity. Industrial buildings were placed directly at the Oder to facilitate the transportation of materials and goods by river.

The factory buildings at the Oder river at Columbus street (dozens of meters from the Central Railway Station) create an extremely unique place in the city. The former name of the street is Oberwieck (Upper Wik, a suburb of the Old City known since the Middle Ages). Since the 19th century, new factories at Columbus street were created. To this day, two objects may be more related to communication: the former tram depot and one of the most famous buildings in the city – the railway station. Various buildings above the station are deployed in a relatively narrow space between the street and rails on one side and the river on the other. Buildings connected to the front sections of the fence create a single line of street frontage. Inner parcels are filled with production halls and warehouses. Historic buildings, alcohol plant, and yeast mills erected between 1900 and 1910 were used to ornament the whole

Oder industrial belt in the direction of buildings dating back to the Pomorzańska Dam [9]. Industrialists like F. Crepin, F. Ruckforth, and C. Lefevre produced here yeasts and spirits (with a 20% share of the German yeast market).

After the war the buildings were devastated. The company of F. Crepin was a leader in yeast production and its factory was situated in red brick buildings we see first on the left side of the city buildings at number 60 (fig. 3 [1]).



Fig. 3. Location of three industrial buildings at Columbus street

1. The company of F. Crepin – leader in yeast production, 2. The company of F. Lefevre – leader in yeast production, 3. The former tram depot

Source: author's collection

Initially, in 1814 there was a small distillery at number 37, run by the Crepin family. Sixty years later, the label was taken by F. Hoerder and M. Ebner, who retained the old name of the company. The buildings, some of which still exist today, were created over the years from 1888 to 1922. After 1945 the biggest Polish factory producing yeast was located here. Currently, the remaining building used to house the drying rooms and swimming pools from 1905. It is the best preserved production building and it currently provides rooms for administration. While it was rebuilt in 1998, the site lost its original appearance. However, until 1998 the former distillery housed a cellar belonging to the Szczecin Spirits Plant. At this place they matured “Starka”, a natural vodka made with rectified spirit based on rye. The building was established as the Department of Technical Services of TP SA (Polish telecommunications provider), and since 2010 it became one of the departments belonging to the Marshal's Office.

Another object with number 81-83, whose walls are immersed in the water of the Oder, is a well preserved former industrial plant of C. Lefevre (fig. 3 [2]). The present building dates mainly from the years 1900-1910, but the company is associated with this place much earlier. The department at the Columbus street appears in the archives from May 1899

onwards, when the owner undertook the work on the extension of the company. The effect was quick, after erecting factory buildings with stores, engineers assembled a connector on the second floor of the establishment of hardware and construction. According to the archives, in 1901 the redevelopment of the property included: an old apartment building probably from 1850s, fire station, boiler house (with a 38 m chimney), stable and factory building [10]. In 1902 the stables were built at a new warehouse, a year later another magazine was adapted to house the old fire station. New warehouse factory buildings are combined with an indoor porch, hung at a height of four storeys. In 1905 the enlarged portion located directly on the Oder.

In the interwar owners changed frequently. In 1924 the factory became a part of Lefevre Rückforth-Konzern. Just before WW2, the new owner of the buildings was Karl Gless, Managing Waren – und Herings – Großhandlung Kaffee – und Getreide – Großfösterie (wholesale colonial goods, coffee roaster and corn) [11].

In 1944 the factory suffered losses. One of the bombs hit a residential building located in the complex. The postwar fate of the complex is associated with the Enterprise Content Horticultural and Agricultural.

The third yeast and spirits tycoon, Rückforth, had the least luck. The factory buildings (vis-à-vis Lefevre buildings) were destroyed and only an office building remains till the present time, which can be seen from the water area, deep in the second row of factory buildings. Rückforth family founded the first distillery in Szczecin. In time the brand become synonymous with exceptional quality cognacs and liqueurs. Until 1945, the company had been developing dynamically. The family business evolved into a company that controls hundreds of companies in Pomerania. The factory itself, however, was significantly damaged during the war. Factory buildings and offices were completely destroyed. Only a storage of grain and malt survived. Today it is a seat of several plants. It is interesting that the name FRN A.G., is still visible today on the façade of building at number 5.

Conclusion

Arriving at the city centre via the “forgotten” industrial part of Szczecin is troublesome only for tall mast ships, because of several obstacles like low, concrete bridges effectively reduce the number of visitors to this area. The entire route is strewn with the mementos of the times of the largest and fastest economic growth: old railway bridges, canals, and facilities of the former cement works, shipyards, and coal towers. After overcoming these difficulties, we reach the city centre, in which we see objects like from a fairytale, growing out of water straight into impressive buildings (a former yeast factory, a distillery, chocolate and liqueurs factories), remembering the times of their 19th century splendour, when food industry and distilling played a dominant role. After the WW2 destructions, most of the buildings have not been restored and to these days fall into disrepair.

From the conversation with friends from sailing circles as well as those who do not use the water communication, it can be seen that the district known as “Venice of Szczecin” is

The last factory building seen on the left side of the navigable route, under the number 86 to 89, is a complex of buildings of the former tram depot established in 1879 (fig. 4 [3]). These buildings were adapted mainly with horse tram depot in mind. There were facilities for 90 horses, 22 wagons, along with workshops and food stores. The face of the building changed with the electrification of tramlines. Since 1994, it is occupied by the Szczecin Business Center. In the depths of the old depot building on the Jaskółcza island, there is an electric plant, which in conjunction with modification and electrification of horse trams had to be developed. To the island runs a small bridge (length 36.5 m, 1.78 m clearance), one of a few surviving, original German steel bridges. It was designed by Hermann Scholl and built in 1921. The island is also a fishing dock, and from 2010 also Vocational School Complex No. 1 [12].

rather unbeaten, unknown. Only one travel agency in Szczecin offers customers a walk through the water areas of the city [13]. However, there are ideas on how to manage and enhance the area of Columbus Street. Among the projects are those that involve the creation of an artificial island next to Jaskółcza Island, exclusion of Columbus Street from traffic jams and the thread of trams [14], luxury hotels and apartment houses, shops, marinas, art centres and exhibition halls [15]. I believe that many of the ideas will find their application in practice someday.

It should be mentioned once again, there is no other city in Poland, which lies along the river, and which would possess all possible factory buildings within urban areas. It also has a huge potential for development and adaptation of the Oder River sites for tourists: walking paths, waterways, water objects, sites near water. Moreover it is located in the very centre of Szczecin, which boasted vibrant life in the near the Oder only a few dozen years ago.

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