

Transformation and *genius loci* of holiday resorts in the Otwock Region from the end of the 19th century, in the 20th century and now

Abstract

At the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the landscape, climate and spa values of today's Otwock Region became important factors influencing the dynamic development of spa or summer housing estates in the vicinity of Warsaw. Cities and towns were created mainly in the vicinity of the railway lines implemented at that time, especially in the areas of railway stations and stops: the Drogi Żelaznej Nadwiślańskiej – commonly known as the Vistula Railway – and the narrow-gauge commute railway, Jabłonowska Kolejka Dojazdowa. The enthusiasts to whom the Otwock Region owes its existence and development were land owners, entrepreneurs, residents, and vacationers coming from Warsaw to rest. Many of them were visionaries who promoted previously unknown forms of business or investment: professor Józef Geisler – a doctor and specialist in the treatment of lung diseases, land owners: Michał Elwiro Andriolli in Brzegi (Świder), Ksawery Branicki in Anin and Karol Jakub Hanneman in Falenica. In 1924 Otwock was recognized as a health resort. To the north of it, there were rural communes with a holiday character (Wawer Commune, Letnisko Falenica Commune). In the following years, these cities and towns developed dynamically. They became a summer home, lodging and leisure base for the inhabitants of Warsaw quickly gaining more and more popularity. Buildings that are inextricably associated with the Otwock Region

are buildings known as *świdermajer*. Currently, this term mainly applies to residential, holiday homes and guesthouses, and some public buildings (less common), representing common features related to the body, building material, structure, architectural detail, etc., which were built in the years 1880–1939 in towns located along the Otwock railway line. During their construction, a wooden structure was used, usually using commonly available pine beams, square timbers and boards. World War II decimated the inhabitants of the Otwock Region, mainly of Jewish origin. The infrastructure and numerous objects, especially wooden ones, were destroyed. The following years brought many changes: of an administrative and territorial nature, the emergence of new housing estates, the introduction of other than traditional forms of development, its intensification, urbanization encroaching on forest areas, settlements merging into one organism, deforestation of plots, introducing secondary divisions, reducing the biologically active area, air pollution, development of underground and communication infrastructure, etc. Nevertheless, the identity and *genius loci* of the Otwock Region are still tangible. Forest areas, sandy dunes, the Świder and Vistula rivers, numerous contemporary and historical sites, especially the *świdermajer* ones, still remain attractive.

Keywords genius loci | Otwock | Falenica | Wawer | *świdermajer*

Introduction

The Otwock Region is an area of the right-bank edge of the Vistula valley, from Marysin Wawerski in Warsaw to the vicinity of Dęblin. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the landscape, climate and spa values of this area – pine forest complexes, sandy ground, the Vistula and Świder rivers being attractive for recreation – became important factors influencing the dynamic development of spa towns (Otwock) or summer resorts (Falenica, Świder, Józefów, Anin, etc.).

The aim of the article is to introduce the subject related to the development and *genius loci* of the Otwock Region, especially the part that belonged to the pre-war Letnisko Falenica Commune, presently the Wawer District of the Capital City of Warsaw. For this reason, the study is general in nature. The method of work was based on a review, analyses and research of literature well known to the author relating to the above-mentioned issues. Based on the results of these activities and the analysis of the archival and source materials in the possession of the author, a summary of her own long-term fascinations and observations was made¹.

The development of towns located in the Otwock Region

The development of railways was an important factor in the development of localities in the area discussed in this article. The communication of these areas with the help of new forms of transport with the nearby Warsaw, as well as with other cities, meant that from the end of the 19th century, new cities and towns emerged and rapidly developed in the vicinity of railway lines, especially in the areas of railway stations and stops. The Droga Żelazna Nadwiślańska,

commonly known as the Vistula Railway, opened in 1877, was created thanks to the initiative of the banker Leopold Kronenberg, who in the years 1874–1877 financed the construction of the railway from Kowel in Ukraine via Lublin, Warsaw to Mława. The following stops were built: Wawer (1878), Radość (1898), Falenica (stop and station) (1897), Józefów (1898), Świder (1898), Otwock (stop and station). The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is also the period of creating a new form of communication around the capital – narrow-gauge commute railways². The popular “choo-choos” created a development opportunity for the regions and towns they reached. The construction of the Jabłonna Commute Railway on the Jabłonna-Wawer section began in 1899. On April 16, 1914, another section of the railway from Wawer to Karczew was officially opened³ (Fig. 1).

The enthusiasts to whom the Otwock Region owes its existence and development were land owners, entrepreneurs, residents, as well as vacationers coming from Warsaw to rest. Many of them were visionaries who promoted previously unheard-of forms of business or investment. One of the people who tied his fate with this area and significantly contributed to the promotion of its features was Professor Józef Geisler⁴ – a doctor and specialist in the treatment of lung diseases. In 1893 he moved to Karczew, discovered the beneficial health properties of the local climate, and then decided to establish the first tuberculosis

¹ The author has been working for many years in the community of the Falenica Enthusiasts Society and the Falenica Circle at the Warsaw Branch of the Association of Polish Architects, and deals with issues related to the history and the present day of the Otwock Region, especially the Falenica neighbourhood, where she lives.

² Lines to Konstancin (via Wilanów), to Grójec (with a branch to Góra Kalwaria), to Radzymin (via Marki), or to Jabłonna (from Wawer) were built. In the same period, the Sochaczew, Myszenice and Mława lines were also built.

³ J. Kasprzycki, J.S. Majewski, *Korzenie miasta*, tom VI, *Niedaleko od Warszawy*, Warszawa 2004; R. Lewandowski, *Kronenberg, Andriolli i wilegiatura czyli podwarszawskie letniska linii otwockiej*, Józefów 2012; R. Lewandowski, *Droga Żelazna nadwiślańska*, Józefów 2007; A. Wośko-Czeranowska, *Osie rozwoju w strukturach słabo zurbanizowanych, na przykładzie Falenicy- eksperyment zrealizowany i realizowany*, in: *Miastotwórcza rola osi miejskich- eksperyment w natarciu*, „Urbanistyka. Międzyuczelniane Zeszyty Naukowe”, Warszawa 2017, no. 23, p. 64–87.

⁴ R. Lewandowski, *Kronenberg*, op.cit.

sanatorium in Otwock. In the following years, other health centers were established in the area.

At the end of the 19th century, the owners of the land began to parcel out the plots of land next to the railway tracks: Michał Elwiro Andriolli⁵ in Brzegi (Świder) (Fig. 2), Ksawery Branicki in Anin, Karol Jakub Hanneman⁶ in Falenica. It became the turning point for today's settlements and initiated the present spatial arrangement of cities and towns lying along the so-called Otwock line. At the same time, the importance of rural settlement units (located closer to the Vistula) decreased in favor of complexes with a new summer and recreational function. The initiatives of enthusiasts and visionaries contributed to building and consolidating the identity of the place.

In the following years, representatives of the Polish community, as well as Russian, German settlers and a large number of Jews settled in the newly emerging and dynamically developing cities and towns. A significant number of inhabitants of different nationalities contributed to the creation of a specific local culture and folklore.

In 1924 Otwock was recognized as a health resort of public utility character⁷ and became a popular center of lowland spa and health treatment in Poland. To the north of it, there was a holiday commune (Commune of Letnisko

Falenica⁸). More and more residents settled in the villages, many of them patients of the health care facilities and spas, as well as summer vacationers who wanted to spend their free time away from the nuisances of the city, but remaining in its immediate vicinity. This trend of vacationeering (called *latowanie* or *wilegiatura*) was popular at the time⁹.

In the following years, cities and towns developed dynamically (Fig. 3). They became a summer accommodation and leisure base for the inhabitants of Warsaw, and were gaining more and more popularity. Numerous residential buildings, villas and guesthouse buildings, mainly wooden ones, were built in the *świdermajer* style that emerged in this area, as well as some brick and wooden public utility buildings¹⁰.

The commune of Letnisko Falenica was initially made up of the following towns: Falenica-Wille, Józefów, Emilianów, Miedzeszyn-Wille, Zbójna Góra-Radość, Kaczy Dół, Michalin and Jarosław, Wille Świdorskie and Anin (presently: Anin, Międzyzlesie, Daków, Zbójna Góra, Radość, Miedzeszyn Nowy, Miedzeszyn, Falenica, Michalin, Józefów and Świder). On April 1, 1939, there were territorial changes involving the addition and detachment of some of the areas¹¹. On May 15, 1951¹², the boundaries of the capital city of Warsaw were changed, incorporating the

⁵ Michał Elwiro Andriolli, painter and graphic artist. In 1880, he bought from Zygmunt Kurtz a fragment of the Anielin farm on the Świder River (Otwock Wielki property) and named it Brzegi. It was a forest area. The artist built there a manor house for himself and 15 holiday homes for Varsovians: R. Lewandowski, *Brzegi Andriollego*, Józefów 2010; idem, *Kronenberg, Andriolli i wilegiatura czyli podwarszawskie letniska linii otwockiej*, Józefów 2012; J. Tabendzki (selection and review), *Andriolli artysta, patriota, wizjoner*, Warszawa 1988.

⁶ The long-time owner of the Błota and Falenica estates bought the Falenice estates in 1888. When in 1892 a fire broke out burning down the forest on both sides of the railway tracks, he decided to take the opportunity and began to divide the burnt out area into large plots of land for development. He wanted to build a summer resort that was fashionable at the time: J. Dobrzyńska, *Falenica moja miłość*, Warszawa 1995.

⁷ Regulation of the Council of Ministers of December 28, 1923, Journal of Laws of 1924, No. 14, item 131.

⁸ Journal of Laws of 1924 no. 97, item 901.

⁹ "wylęciatura," arch. longer stay in the countryside to get rest (according to the PWN Dictionary of the Polish Language).

¹⁰ P. Ajdacki, *Spacerownik Otwocki – Przewodnik historyczno-sentymentalny*, Otwock 2012; J. Czerniawski, *Wawer. Korzenie i współczesność*, Warszawa 2008; E. Diehl, *Wille w Otwocku i warunki pobytu tamże*, Warszawa 1893; J. Kałużko, P. Ajdacki, *Otwock i okolice*, Pruszków 2006; J. Kasprzycki, J.S. Majewski, op.cit., R. Lewandowski, *Brzegi Andriollego*, op.cit.; idem, *Kronenberg, Andriolli i wilegiatura czyli podwarszawskie letniska linii otwockiej*, op. cit.; J. Tabendzki, op.cit.; E. Pustola-Kozłowska, *Z przeszłości Otwocka – „wzorowej miejscowości leczniczej”*, „Mazowsze” 1994, vol. 3, no. 2; A. Wośko-Czeranowska, op.cit.

¹¹ Journal of Laws of 1939 no. 28, item 188.

¹² Journal of Laws of 1951 no. 27, item 199.

communes of Borków, Julianów, Miedzeszyn, Miedzeszyn Nowy, Miedzeszyn Wieś, Radość, Zagózdź, Wólka Zerzeńska and some of the communities Michalin, Falenica, Błota and Zbójna Góra. Then, the Commune of Letnisko Falenica was liquidated. In 1960, the boroughs from Wawer to Falenica were incorporated into the Praga Południe district. In 1994, an independent commune of Warszawa-Wawer was established, which was transformed into the Wawer district of the capital city of Warsaw in 2002. The boroughs included in it as subordinate auxiliary units are: Aleksandrów, Anin, Falenica, Las, Marysin Wawerski Południe, Marysin Wawerski Północ, Miedzeszyn, Międzyzlesie, Nadwiśle, Radość, Sadul, Wawer, and Zerzeń (Fig. 4, 5).

Świdermajer – the genius loci of the Otwock Region

The buildings most commonly associated with the Otwock Region are those erected in the local *świdermajer* style¹³. Currently, this term mainly applies to residential, holiday homes and guesthouses, and some public buildings (less common), representing common features related to the body, building material, structure, architectural detail, etc., which were built in the years 1880–1939 in towns located along the

Ottock railway line. During their construction, a wooden structure was used, usually using commonly available pine beams, square timbers and boards.

The buildings were most often erected on a rectangular plan. Picturesque porches, verandas, balconies, loggias and outbuildings (with equally simple or more complex shapes) added a touch of sculpting to this relatively simple outline. The houses had sloping roofs with usually a small – about 30 degrees – slope angle. They were erected in a wooden post-and-timber structure (used in attics or on the upper floors) built of square timber, covered with boards on the outside and inside, which allowed for quick construction and made their cost relatively low, while leaving the available variety of details and forms nearly unlimited. The characteristic “lacy” carving detail, often referred to as “laudatory” (*laubzegowy*), was made with the use of simple tools and often drastically varied in shape and form.

Originally, the buildings were most often built in the forest. Their height, in principle, did not exceed two and a half storeys. Extensive verandas were attached to the main body of the building, and sometimes those were also “suspended” at the height of the first floor. They ensured the optimal use of the therapeutic effects of the surrounding pine forests. The treetops were located at the height of the windows of the upper storey, i.e. where the concentration of ethereal substances was highest. On the other hand, the verandas located on the ground floor allowed for direct contact with the surrounding nature, favored lounging, and also increased the area of the often tiny guest rooms (Fig. 6, 7).

In the buildings of *świdermajer* style bear references to the pavilions presented at world exhibitions that were fashionable at that time (such as the agricultural exhibition in 1885 in Warsaw), the styles of the Russian dachas of the same period, alpine shelters and wooden buildings typical of spa and holiday resorts from the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

¹³ This colloquial term was used by Konstanty Ildefons Gałczyński in the song *Wycieczka do Świdra* (Excursion to Świdra): „Te wille, jak wójt podaje są w stylu »świdermajer«”. Information on *świdermajer* style in construction was taken, inter alia, from: A. Centroni, *Styl »Świdermajer» architektura do zachowania – Lo stile »Świdermajer» un'architettura da tutelare*, Józefów 2011; A. Cichy, *Znaczenie ozdobnego deskowania w periodyzacji drewnianej architektury w paśmie otwockim problematyka badawcza i konserwatorska*, „Ochrona Zabytków”, 2007, no. 3; J. Dobrzyńska, *Falenica moja miłość*, Warszawa 1995; M. Górski, W. Lach, *Jak wyremontować świdermajer*, Warszawa-Ottock 2016; R. Lewandowski, *Kronenberg, Andriolli i wilegiatura czyli podwarszawskie letniska linii otwockiej*, op.cit.; *Letniska Falenickie 1938*, Józefów 2012; *Letniska Falenickie. Odbitka z „Informatora Uzdrawisk, Letnisk i Osiedli Podstołecznych pn. Lato pod Warszawą”*, Warszawa 1938; A. Wośko-Czeranowska, *Zakłete w drewnie-bajanie o falenickich letniakach*, Warszawa 1993; eadem, *Falenica i okolice - katalog detalu stosowanego w budownictwie drewnianym*, Warszawa 1993.

Numerous buildings with the above-described features started popping up very quickly in the area. They became the hallmark of spa and summer resorts.

The identity of the Otwock Region after World War II

The Second World War decimated the inhabitants, mainly of Jewish origin. The infrastructure and numerous objects, especially wooden ones, were destroyed. The following years brought many changes of different nature and effects. There was often uncontrolled encroachment of urbanization on farmland and forest areas, leading to the “merging” of settlements into a single banded organism (Fig. 8). For years, it was possible to observe the progressive process of building intensification, the emergence of new housing estates and individual buildings with a different character and forms of development. Secondary land divisions were introduced. The process of farming plots of land is progressing, reducing the share of biologically active area, lowering the level of groundwater, etc. These processes are accompanied by the continuous development of communication infrastructure, which often leads to an increase in air pollution. At the same time, housing estates are becoming more and more attractive to residents. Numerous investments aimed at streamlining, improving or implementing new underground and communication infrastructure, the emerging public utility facilities, trade and gastronomy, as well as new residents, make the Otwock Region an attractive place to live and thrive.

During World War II, many *świdermajer* buildings were destroyed as a result of hostilities. In the following years, these objects were further destroyed or degraded, resulting not only from the nature of their building material. Rather, the main reasons were the lack of legitimate owners of the

“social housing” buildings and the over-tenancy of the buildings, as well as the lack of maintenance and refurbishment. In order to obtain a greater number of rooms, secondary divisions were introduced into the interior. The lack of sanitary facilities, running water, and the need for heating with tiled stoves made many residents move out. These buildings came to be pejoratively referred to as “clogs” or “pekings”. They were and are, unfortunately, still devastated, sometimes even set on fire by their users or vandals. A sad testimony of the changes and the passing time of is, unfortunately, the *świdermajer* style that is decaying and disappearing forever (Fig. 9)...

The political transformation after 1989 initiated the “renaissance of the *świdermajer*” that continues to this day. Many owners regain their property and start renovations, transformations and adaptations of the buildings, other buildings find new buyers. There are also new building complexes, facilities that are entirely, or at least in some of their elements inspired by the old *świdermajer* architecture (Fig. 10).

Conclusion

The identity and *genius loci* of the Otwock Region can still be felt all the time. The elements that led to its creation and development still remain attractive. Forest areas, sandy dunes, the Świder and Vistula rivers, numerous contemporary and historical objects, especially *świdermajer* ones, carefully restored by their owners, modernized and inspired by old patterns, attract new residents and developers. The Otwock Region is developing. It is important to respond to the contemporary needs and challenges without losing the character of the place, and to try to preserve and emphasize its values, referring to good practices and patterns of behavior, allowing for the harmonious existence of historical and contemporary elements.

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