

RIVERS VERSUS TOWNS FRONT OR BACK ORIENTATION

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Scholars have often stressed the fact that, in the history of our continent, rivers have played a considerable cultural role, shaped human settlements, intertwined with the history of States, towns and nations, and became one of the main features determining the fitness of architectural and urban projects.

Numerous towns and cities grew on their banks, dominated by mighty fortified castles and splendid residences, with ample churches and monastery complexes. Great civilisations were born and developed in river basins, and great cultures in their estuaries.

Along with lakes and seas, rivers embellished the natural landscape and became an important element of transformed landscape, today called the culturlandscape. River banks witnessed great spectacles of life; here the inhabitants of towns and villages went for walks, fished and washed their clothes, played and rested or even performed sacred rites.

A crucial role in the history of Poland, and in its social and cultural development, was played by the largest Polish river, the Vistula. Ever since the Palaeolithic era it served as a trading route, and at the beginning of Polish statehood it became a waterway, down which salt, grain, timber and building stone were transported. Its northern part constituted a fragment of the famous amber route leading from the Adriatic to the Baltic Sea. Krakow and Warsaw, two historic capitals of Poland, grew on the banks of the Vistula, along with numerous picturesque historic towns: Sandomierz, Kazimierz, Pulawy, Plock, Torun and Grudziadz. At its mouth, Gdansk was built on the Baltic coast with the Wislouwjskie fortress for centuries protecting the Gdansk port

In the areas to the west of the Vistula, the Oder and its tributary Warta also played an important role for the development of settlement and culture. On the banks of the Oder, numerous historic towns such as Wroclaw, Raciborz, Legnica, Swidnica, Opole, Brzeg and Szczecin were built, and on the Warta, Czestochowa, Kolo Konin and Poznan. The same can be said about many other rivers: the Bug and the Niemen, as well as the Wilia and the Wilejka; on their banks, the picturesque architectural complexes of Drohiczyn, Grodno and Vilna were erected.

For many centuries, most Polish towns developed in close harmony with rivers, which were not only essential to their social and economic progress, but also an important element of their landscape, immortalised by painters and photographers. The growing degradation of many rivers, the establishment of towns further and further away from their mainstreams, and the gradual loss of their previous importance for agglomerations, have been responsible for the disappearance of rivers from modern art and from the consciousness of town inhabitants and local authorities. This is why a large part of our towns turned their backs to their rivers.

This phenomenon became the subject matter of a seminar prepared by the Polish Society for the Protection of Historic Monuments. The papers of the seminar, published in a special volume, will, hopefully, imbue the contemporary projects for spatial development of towns with greater awareness of the cultural and civilisational values of Polish rivers, which will again become important compositional and landscaping elements of urban areas in Poland.

Many towns in eastern Poland are picturesquely situated on river banks, but town-river integration is much weaker than in the case of West European towns. Close links between rivers and the towns weakened, or even vanished, when the defensive and economic importance of the river decreased. A perfect example of this is the town of Janowiec. Only a visual, landscaping tie has remained; in new conditions it can be a rejuvenating factor in the river-town relationship, favourable for the development of tourism.

Janowiec, originally called Serokomla, was situated on the trade route leading from the Baltic Sea, through the Greater Poland Radom district, Janowiec and Lublin, to Ruthenia. Radom has always been Poland's historical regional centre. In the 12th and 13th century, travelling merchants could cross the river in Woyszyna, and in 1442 Mikolaj Zaklika, the owner of Syrokomla, had a bridge built there, the only permanent bridge to be ever built in this region.

The Janowski family moved to Serokomla from Janowice, situated a few kilometres upstream and subject to frequent floods, and settled on Burgh Hill, later named Castle Hill. At that time, the Vistula ran closer to the hill, and right on its bank a small town was built, defended by natural features: the river and a high bluff. It was linear in shape and has remained unchanged until this day.

In 1506 the town received the town charter, according to the Sroda law, but in 1537, when the Fierily family took over Serokomla, it was re-

established according to the Magdeburg law, and received a new name - Janowiec. This was the beginning of a period of great prosperity. With royal permission, the Firleys started to operate their own ferry across the river, which competed successfully with the royal ferry at Kazimierz; due to its more favourable location, it took over merchant trains from Radom. Both the Firleys and the town lived off the river very well; apart from the ferry, they also made profit on the transport of grain, timber and sand along the Vistula waterway. This last item was transported by water until after World War II.

The castle and town of Janowiec and their business suffered severely during the Swedish wars of 1655, when their owner, Jerzy Sebastian Lubomirski, refused to acknowledge Carolus Gustavus as the king of Poland. In the 18th century, Janowiec and the neighbouring Kazimierz entered a period of deep economic crisis, while the Vistula trade moved over to Pulawy, the seat of the Czartoryski family. Moreover, the Vistula had "straightened" its wide curve, moving away from both Janowiec and Kazimierz.

The partitions of Poland at the close of the 18th century brought about a further decline in the Vistula economics. The Napoleonic wars affected the area twice. In 1809, when the Great Army marched to the east, the ruined castle was robbed of large quantities of timber used to build ferry equipment. In 1813 the Russian army, moving to the west, built a bridge with dikes and trenches across the Vistula between Miecierz and Janowiec. Vast meadows in the former Vistula valley have ever since been called "on the trenches." Also during both world wars, river crossings and headlands were established in Janowiec.

After World War II the river economy in Janowiec became stagnant. Research conducted by Jadwiga Teodoowich-Czerepinska, Mieczyslaw Kurzatkowski and Jerzy Zurawski in 1974, 1975, and 1989, indicated a need for a ferry passage across the Vistula.

The new political situation in Poland opened new perspectives for the tourist trade in Janowiec. In the new conditions, studies and projects are financed by local authorities under the control of the provincial government. Legal regulations are provided by the modernised Statute for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage and Museums, which in paragraph 12, point 5, envisages "legal protection of the culturescape in Poland in the form of heritage zones, heritage parks and protection zones." A team consisting of Aleksander Bohm, Wojciech Kosinski and Kazimierz Landecka, the Provincial Preservation Officer in Lublin, prepared a project for the research preceding the study which, as one of the measures, advises "returning" Janowiec back to the Vistula, in the utilitarian/recreational and landscaping aspects.

Dr. **Wojciech Kosinski** received his Ph.D. from the Architectural Technology Department at the University of Krakow, in 1976. He has given numerous guest lectures in Europe, and is the author of many publications on scientific subjects, urban planning and architecture. He has his own Studio Company on planning and urban architecture, and is currently Assistant Professor at the Architectural Technology Department, University of Krakow.