

FACING THE VISTULA. THE ARCHITECTURE OF WYBRZEŻE KOŚCIUSZKOWSKIE AND THE CENTRAL PART OF POWIŚLE IN WARSAW IN THE YEARS 1910–1939

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Introduction

October 2014 saw the opening of the new seat of the Academy of Fine Arts in Powiśle in Warsaw (designed by JEMS Architekci, 2011–2014). The building has filled in a gap in the frontage of Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie between Jaracza and Tamka Streets, a structure that emerged in the early decades of the 20th c. The new premises of the Academy continue the project of redeveloping the banks of the Vistula, going back to the turn of the 20th c., and the post-WW I “Warsaw facing the Vistula” idea of modernizing Powiśle, initiated by the mayor of Warsaw Stefan Starzyński. Thus, the new Academy building is part of the city’s ‘return’ to the river, which started in the 1920s, was stopped by WW II, and is now attempted anew. The following discussion will focus on the development of the fragment of Powiśle delineated by the Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie, Dobra, Leszczyńska and Aleja Trzeciego Maja streets.

The urbanization of Powiśle

The first shot of the 1958 documentary film *Z Powiśla* [From Powiśle] by Kazimierz Karabasz shows a panorama of this part of Warsaw taken from the terrace on the roof of the modernist tower block at 4 Sewerynow Street, with whole quarters of old buildings earmarked for demolition. “The town stopped up there”, says the narrator. In the late 1950s the area was still considered peripheral. In its 20th-century history there had been several attempts at abolishing the division between the better ‘upper town’ and the worse ‘lower town’, which had been firmly established since the early 19th century.

The natural conditions had never been very conducive to Warsaw’s development: the high steep

embankment of the Vistula and the width of the river made the building of bridges difficult. In the 19th c. the Vistula was hardly visible from the streets of the city and the industrial area of Powiśle was highly unappealing already in the 1830s. In the second half of the 19th c., when great industry moved to Wola, Powiśle became a nondescript quarter: neither a vital part of the city nor a suburb. It was a mosaic of scattered small plants, workshops, low wooden houses and structures connected with river transport and trade: piers, bazaars, warehouses. In the 2nd half of the 19th c. most of the tenement houses lacked plumbing; water intakes and privies were located in the yards.¹ At the end of the 19th c. Powiśle was a peripheral, chaotic, neglected and dirty area with industrial and housing functions intermingling; it was also a dangerous corner of the city, suffering from bad sanitary problems. “Along the floodbanks there are many empty plots where cattle graze and lots of slackers idle about [...]. Walking along the banks at night is hardly safe”, warned a guide to Warsaw from 1893.²

The Lindleys’ maps of Warsaw from the turn of the 20th c. show Powiśle with scattered buildings and few quarters of regular dense housing only along several larger streets. Between Dobra Street and the riverbank there were single buildings, mostly wooden, and many unused plots.³ On the river there were sand, gravel, coal and wood yards, and rubbish dumps. That Warsaw had no elegant boulevards did not mean that the riverbank was not an urban area. Many Varsovians made their living from the river; there numerous ferry-men, warehouse workers, tradesmen, fishermen, sand- and gravel- vendors working every day along the banks. “The streets of Powiśle had not cobbles or pavements; rubbish and smelly manure were brought to yards along the river”, wrote Władysław

¹ R. Żelichowski, *Ulice Solca*, Warszawa 1999, p. 158-174.

² After: J. S. Majewski, *Kto mieszkał przed wojną w dzielnicy tuż nad rzeką*, „Magazyn Stołeczny” (supplement to „Gazeta Wyborcza”), 04.04.2014, p. 12.

³ Digital copies of plans from the Archives of Warsaw; <https://www.warszawa.ap.gov.pl/planylindleyow.html> [access: 23.06.2014].

Koleżak.⁴ The industrial character of Powiśle was enhanced by the power plant built in 1903–1904, a huge complex with two chimneys (a 50-metre one and a later 80-metre one) which redefined the area's landscape. The power plant was soon surrounded by workers' houses and warehouses.

Changes started with the construction of the third bridge across the Vistula in 1904–1912. At the beginning of the 20th c. Warsaw was poorly linked with its 'lower town' of Powiśle. Bednarska and Książęca streets were very narrow and had only local significance; Tamka Street became an important artery only after WW II, after Kopernika Street was linked with Świętokrzyska Street. The viaduct over Karowa Street, built in 1902–1905, soon proved insufficient for transport. In 1906 at the exit from the new bridge a boulevard was started, intended to link it with the Kierbedź Bridge (Fig. 1). Till 1910 the works were supervised by the civil engineer Miłkowski, later by Stanisław Bartoszek.⁵ The boulevard was ready together with the bridge. The embankment constructed then had two terraces – a lower and an upper one (Fig. 2), separated by a limestone-paved slope and a cast-iron balustrade, preserved until today in a relatively good condition. The design also included concrete pavements, granite steps leading from the upper terrace to the boulevard with green squares, two descents (at Karowa and Lipowa streets) linking the upper part with the riverbank, streetlamps and benches. In 1916 the upper terrace was provided with two cobblestone roadways (asphalted only in the late 1930s) separated by a wide stretch of greenery with geometric flowerbeds and rows of trees.⁶ In 1917 the municipal authorities named the terraces "Wybrzeża Tadeusza

Kościuszki" [Tadeusz Kościuszko Embankment] to commemorate the centenary of the General's death.⁷

Even before the construction of the boulevard was completed first big-city type buildings started to be erected in the area: the Princess Anna of Mazovia Obstetric Clinic, designed by Kazimierz Skórewicz, and a building for the Warsaw School of Fine Arts, which was particularly important for the development of this part of the city as it initiated changes. The art school, opened in 1904, was first located at 8 Wierzbowa Street but already in 1906 the municipal council gave it a plot "on the Vistula at the exit of Tamka Street" to build a new seat. In 1909 Eugenia Kierbedziowa donated 8 million roubles to the enterprise. *Tygodniku Ilustrowany* [The Illustrated Weekly] wrote in 1914: "In Powiśle, between the second and the third bridge, where until recently we saw only neglect, the generosity and community spirit of Mrs Eugenia Kierbedziowa laid the foundations for what may become the most beautiful district of Warsaw".⁸ Tenders for the design were invited two years later; the conditions specified⁹ that "northern light" was needed for the studios, which affected the design badly, since the building, which was supposed to have its own green yard "for peaceful plein air studies",¹⁰ was not opened towards the new boulevard. The results were known in November 1911; the winner was Bronisław Brochwicz-Rogoyski, nevertheless the construction was started according to Alfons Gravier's design. The version that was actually carried out was different from the tender design (Fig. 3); not much was left of the initial idea of a building in the post-art-nouveau historicism style. The final version was closer to the

⁴ W. Koleżak, *Powiśle Warszawy*, Warszawa 1901, p. 21; W. Kotczak, *Powiśle Warszawy*, „Wędrowiec” 1900, no. 26, p. 506-509.

⁵ A. Suligowski, *Bulwary i most trzeci w Warszawie*, [in:] *Pisma Adolfa Suligowskiego*, vol. II: *Kwestie miejskie*, Warszawa 1915, p. 343; M. Omilanowska, *Most i wiadukt księcia Józefa Poniatowskiego*, Warszawa 1991, p. 33.

⁶ J. Majewski, *Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie w Warszawie*, [in:] *Miasto tyłem do rzeki*, Materiały Sesji Naukowej Warszawa 22-23 czerwca 1995, ed. B. Wierzbicka, Warszawa 1996, p. 158-159; A. Skalimowski, Z. Tucholski, *Zabytkowe bulwary wiślane na Wybrzeżu Kościuszkowskim i Gdańskim*, „Ochrona Zabytków” 2013, no. 1-4, p. 78.

⁷ *Posiedzenie 15 października 1917*, „Dziennik Zarządu Miasta Stołecznego Warszawy”, 1918, no. 26, p. 3. Kwiryna Handke gives 31 Oct 1919 as the date of naming: K. Handke, *Słownik nazewnictwa Warszawy*, Warszawa 1998, p. 369.

⁸ *Warszawska Szkoła Sztuk Pięknych*, „Tygodnik Ilustrowany” 1914, no. 25, p. 489.

⁹ For the history of the construction see: D. M. Kozielska, *Dzieje gmachu ufundowanego przez Eugenię Kierbedziową dla warszawskiej Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych*, [in:] *Wydział Konserwacji i Restauracji Dzieł Sztuki Akademii Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie 1947–1997*, Warszawa 1997; also: eadem, *Mecenat rodziny Kierbedziów na rzecz warszawskiej Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych*, [in:] *Działalność filantropijna honorowej obywatelki m. st. Warszawy Eugenii Kierbedziowej w 50. Rocznicę śmierci*, Warszawa 1998, p. 21-23. Eugenia Kierbedziowa also founded a building for the Society for Supporting Folk Industry (designed by Teofil Wiśniowski, 1913): C. Młodzianowski, *Polski przemysł ludowy*, „Sztuka w Rzemiośle” 1925, issue IX, p. 9.

¹⁰ *Konkurs XXXIV na gmach warszawskiej Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych rozpisuje Koło Architektów w Warszawie*, „Przegląd Techniczny” 1911, no. 33, p. 426.

designs prepared for the tender by Henryk Stifel-
man and Stanisław Weiss.¹¹ The proto-modernist
northern elevation of Gravier's building, with its
large windows and simple classicist elements (pilas-
ters), formally close to the second phase of Charles
Mackintosh's Glasgow School of Art (1909), was
more important than the front elevation. The classic
order was broken and the form of the building was
governed by its functions. Along "the embankment
street" Gravier designed an office building with an
entrance in, as he wrote, "the empire style of the
Duchy of Warsaw times".¹² It was a small building
with an unimposing three-axis facade and an Ionic
portico. Nevertheless, it remained the most distin-
guished edifice at the boulevard for over a decade.

Between the World Wars

The outbreak of WW I stopped the urbanization
of the vicinity of Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie but
soon, in 1916, the authors of *Szkic wstępny planu
regulacyjnego m.st. Warszawy* [The draft of a regu-
lation plan for Warsaw] proposed to build a viaduct
for a cross-town railway line in Powiśle.¹³ Even
before Poland regained independence in 1918, War-
saw architects had been concerned with the area,
even though detailed plans were prepared only in
the 1920s. On 1st September 1917 the Association of
Architects invited tenders for redeveloping Powiśle.
The designs submitted tried to explore the trans-
port and landscape merits of the embankment. The
competition was resolved in February 1918.¹⁴ The
winning design was that by Władysław Michalski
and Mieczysław Kozłowski; impressive drawings
were also submitted by Edmund Bartłomiejczyk

(Fig. 4). The two architects suggested building
a small railway station where the Powiśle station
in nowadays located; they also proposed less dense
housing, inspired by the redevelopment of Berlin
in 1910. Instead of the extensive usage of build-
ing plots, resulting in well-like courtyards, and the
quarter structure so characteristic of 19th-century
Warsaw housing, they wanted to introduce build-
ings arranged around expanded green courtyards,
which became popular in the inter-war period. The
second prize was given to Edward Eber, Romuald
Gutt and Franciszek Krzywda-Polkowski. This
team's picturesque design was inspired by the con-
cept of garden-city, by Camillo Sitte's ideas and by
the tradition of Polish small towns. If their design
had been implemented, Powiśle would have got its
own market square at the crossroads of Książęca
and Rozbrat streets. The cross-town line station was
to be located in the lower part of the area, at Solec
Street, as in Tołwiński's design. Among interest-
ing solutions was also the one proposed by Juliusz
Nagórski, analyzed in *Przegląd Techniczny* [The
Technical Review], which assumed "moving the
city towards the river". This architect, a graduate of
the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, designed wide
boulevards and squares with columns and radiating
streets, inspired by French traditions; he also wanted
less dense housing for the future Powiśle.¹⁵

Warsaw architects argued about the location of
the cross-town line. In 1918 Czesław Domiewski
wrote: "The regulation of Powiśle is one of the
major tasks in working out a plan for the whole of
Warsaw."¹⁶ He was against cutting this part of the
city with a railway viaduct. Clearly inspired by the
City Beautiful Movement, he proposed turning the

¹¹ *Rozstrzygnięcie XXXIV konkursu na gmach warszawskiej Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych*, „Przegląd Techniczny” 1912, no. 9, p. 113-119; *Rozstrzygnięcie konkursu na gmach warszaw. Szkoły Sztuk Pięknych*, „Architekt” 1912, no. 1 (p. 15), no. 2 (table III, IV, V), no. 3-4 (table XIII-XIV).

¹² A.G. [Alfons Gravier], *Szkoła Sztuk Pięknych w Warszawie*, „Przegląd Techniczny” 1915, no. 3-4, p. 23-25; idem, *Szkoła Sztuk Pięknych*, „Przegląd Techniczny” 1915, no. 7-8, p. 63.

¹³ T. Kotaszewicz, *Koncepcje przestrzennego rozwoju Warszawy w pracach Tadeusza Tołwińskiego 1916–1946*, Warszawa 1994.

¹⁴ *Konkurs LVI Koła Architektów na rozplanowanie i parcelację części Powiśla przy wiadukcie Poniatowskiego*, „Przegląd Techniczny” 1918, no. 9-12, p. 82-87.

¹⁵ J. Nagórski, *Projekt zabudowania dzielnicy Powiśla przy wiadukcie im. Ks. Józefa*, „Przegląd Techniczny” 1919, no. 33-48, p. 171. In the late 1930s there was an idea of building a new street in this place, named "Aleja Pod Skarpą" [The

Alley Below the Embankment]. The former area of barracks was to be turned into an elegant housing estate of the State Pension Fund. Three-storeyed modernist houses were to be designed by Juliusz Żórawski, Bohdan Lachert and Józef Szanajca. The project was never carried out due to the outbreak of WW II: D. Błaszczuk, *Juliusz Żórawski. Przerwane dzieło modernizmu*, Warszawa 2010, p. 128-131.

¹⁶ Cz. Domaniewski, *W sprawie regulacji Powiśla*, „Przegląd Techniczny” 1918, no. 13-16, p. 111. Architects' interest in Powiśle may have been intensified due to the fact that since from November 1915 to October 1916 the Department of Architecture of Warsaw Technical University had its seat in the School of Fine Arts. Everyday strolls through the shabby district must have been a powerful inspiration to plan improvements: B. Popławski, *Początki Wydziału Architektury Politechniki Warszawskiej w świetle nieznanych dotąd dokumentów*, „Ochrona Zabytków” 2006, no. 3, p. 11-116.

Vistula bank between the Poniatowski Bridge and the Kierbedź Bridge into a government quarter with monumental edifices surrounded by parks.¹⁷ Despite such voices the cross-town line with a railway bridge was finally opened in 1933; it took over ten years to construct.

The architecture of Powiśle

In the 1920s both the Central Planning Office and the municipal authorities supported the cooperative movement, intended to be one of the major sectors of the economy, alongside the state and private sectors. In the early 1930s the capital city had 165 housing cooperatives, which were to provide an alternative to profiteering house-building and to alleviate the shortage of accommodation in Warsaw.¹⁸ Cooperative house-building became very prominent in Powiśle in the 1920s. The area's architecture exemplifies the whole range of styles applied in Warsaw housing at the turn of the 1930s. One can find here the late eclectic style (e.g. the house of the bankers' cooperative "Domostwo" at 6 Czerwonego Krzyża St, designed by Józef Napoleon Czerwiński, 1927–1928)¹⁹ and expressive zig-zag forms (the corner house with triangular bay windows at 2 Dobra St, 1926–1928, attributed to Karol Jankowski).²⁰ The most interesting cooperative house from that period is "Nowe Domostwo" [The New House] (by Piotr Kwiek, 1929–1931), a five-storeyed house of the Polish Bank Cooperative at 3 Jaracza St, its cubic form inspired by Robert Mallet Stevens's designs of the 1920s. Its dark balustrades contrast sharply with the plain unornamented bright walls (Fig. 5). It is U-shaped, following a design fashionable in Paris in the early 20th c. and applied in Warsaw already before WW I (e.g. 99 Aleje Jerozolimskie). The lack of a traditional 'front' in the U-design was intended

to provide better lighting, but in this case, as it was commented in the popular monthly *Architektura i Budownictwo* [Architecture and Building], "the choice was not motivated by any reasonable argument, any planning idea, any aesthetic or hygienic considerations, but only by the fact that each of the 40 members of the cooperative wanted to have a flat with windows at the «front»".²¹

"Nowe Domostwo" was situated next to the house of the Cooperative for House-Building (1926–1927, destroyed during WW II), (Fig. 6), which, together with "Dom Kolejarza" [Railwayman House], the seat of the Railway Trade Union (designed by Romuald Miller, 1924–1928), surrounded the exit of Czerwonego Krzyża Street (now Jaracza Street) to Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie.²² "Dom Kolejarza" was a multi-functional building, with offices (entered from the corner), a theatre (entered from Jaracza Street), a hotel and a club. The interiors, designed by Romuald Miller and Wojciech Jastrzębowski, represent the Polish variant of *art déco*. The above-mentioned houses were among the first examples of big-city architecture on the Vistula boulevard after the Warsaw School of Fine Arts. In the 1920s large reinforced-concrete buildings began to appear in its vicinity. The corner of Tamka and Smulikowskiego streets became the seat of the Swedish Alfa Laval company, a producer of dairy machines (designed by Teodor Łapiński, Józef Krupa, 1927–1929).²³ In 1931 the church of St Theresa of the Child Jesus was started at 4 Tamka St, its form based on modernized Romanesque motifs.²⁴

The first monumental building with a façade facing Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie was the headquarters of ZNP (Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego – the Trade Union of Polish Teachers), located close to the above-mentioned cooperative and unionist quarter at Jaracza Street. Tenders for the design of the

¹⁷ Ibidem.

¹⁸ The state gave loans to housing cooperatives. The cooperative had to invest about 30%, while the remaining costs were financed from state loans: *Spółdzielnie mieszkaniowe*, „Kronika Warszawy” 1932, no. 5-6, p. 16; A. Z., *Stosunki mieszkaniowe w Warszawie*, „Kronika Warszawy” 1933, no. 3, p. 139-140.

¹⁹ J. Zieliński, *Atlas architektury ulic i placów Warszawy*, vol. 2, Warszawa 1996, p. 168; J. S. Majewski, *Dom na Powiślu z portretem polskiej inteligencji*, „Gazeta Stołeczna”, suplement to „Gazeta Wyborcza” 05.12.2013, p. 15.

²⁰ J. Zieliński, *Atlas architektury ulic i placów Warszawy*, vol. 3, Warszawa 1996, p. 26-27. Houses with triangular bay windows were designed by Henri Sauvage i Charles Sarazin in Paris already at the beginning of the 20th c. In this case,

however, the inspiration probably came from the works of the Amsterdam School and German expressionists.

²¹ S. M., *Dom Spółdzielni mieszkaniowej urzędników Banku Polskiego „Nowe Domostwo”*, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1931, no. 5-6, p. 189.

²² R. Miller, *Dom Związku Zawodowego pracowników kolejowych Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1928, no. 6, p. 175-208.

²³ *Arch.: Teodor Łapiński i Józef Krupa (Warszawa). Centrala f. „Alfa-Laval” w Warszawie*, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1930, no. 12, p. 462-466.

²⁴ M. Koczańska, *Konstanty Sylwin Jakimowicz – życie i twórczość (1879–1960)*, „Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki” 1990, issue 3-4, p. 232.

building were invited in 1929. 65 designs were submitted; the competition was resolved in the following year.²⁵ The design that was actually carried out was the one by Teodor Bursze and Antoni Kowalski, which had got the second prize (Fig. 7).²⁶ The ZNP complex, cut by Smulikowskiego Street, was built in the years 1930–1933. The reinforced-concrete buildings required ferroconcrete footings since they were situated in the old channel of the Vistula. Finishing works continued till 1934. An article in *Architektura i Budownictwo* stressed that the complex was monumental and that the elevation was composed of “the simplest and most basic elements: huge surfaces and horizontal and vertical lines [...]”,²⁷ but did not like the “tall sky-scrapers” screening off the view on the river.²⁸ This reservation concerned the most prominent part of the ZNP complex, the seven-storeyed office building closing the eastern inner yard at Smulikowskiego Street. The elevation of this building is indeed reminiscent of New York sky-scrapers (Fig. 8) and it was often photographed. The highly modern complex had its own internal telephone line and “a system for summoning people”. The interiors were very beautifully decorated; particularly conspicuous were ornamental wrought-iron gratings, *art déco* woodwork and stone facing (Fig. 9).

The part of the ZNP complex adjacent to Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie housed a restaurant, a café and club rooms. The main elevation, with prism-shaped rustication in the lower part and four lesenes alternating with three tall narrow windows, is – rather surprisingly – not really integrated with the green boulevard. Even though it has a terrace and a balcony, the building seems to be turned away from the boulevard. Bursze and Kowalski’s design compares rather unfavourably with the work submitted by Jan Klewin, reminiscent of designs from the Nieuwe Bouwen circle (Fig. 10, 11). This architect proposed huge windows on the ground floor, a gallery on the highest floor and a roof terrace. A similar ‘opening’ of this part of the ZNP complex towards the Vistula and the boulevard was also attempted in

the design by Helena and Szymon Syrkus, members of the “Praesens” group. They designed an avant-garde building with a façade reminiscent of Bata stores (Fig. 12). They planned a roof terrace, which had elements inspired by lifeboat lifts, as in Hans Scharoun’s hotel for the childless and single in WUWA [1929 Workplace and House Exhibition] in Breslau. They also designed a new pavement and geometric flowerbeds for Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie. None of those avant-garde designs was favoured by the jury, among whose members were Marian Lalewicz and Wojciech Jastrzębowski.

The embankment and the boulevards

In 1931 *Kurier Warszawski* [The Warsaw Courier] wrote: “The Vistula boulevards are no longer an object of ridicule. They are ceasing to be a meeting point for the dregs of society and freebooters. Among its flowerbeds and lawns, Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie has already acquired its first memorial (to “Dowborczycy” [the Polish 1st Corps in Russia]); it is becoming a place for recreation, a safer place [...]”²⁹ In the inter-war period Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie was one of the municipal council’s flagship investments. Photographs from the 1930s show crowds of people strolling along the boulevard, attracted by the greenery, carefully tended by the Gardening Department of the municipal council. Wybrzeże was also decorated with statues: in 1930 the above-mentioned memorial to “Dowborczycy” by Michał Kamieński was erected at the exit of Lipowa Street, and just before the outbreak of WW II a statue of the Warsaw Mermaid, by Ludwika Nitschowa, was placed at the exit of Tamka Street.

In the inter-war period in spring and summer the bank of the Vistula was buzzing with activity. Sunday cruises were very popular; at the lower boulevard there were numerous harbours, e.g. of the “St. i J. Górnicy” company. Some ships cruised to Sandomierz and Toruń and in 1934 the “Vistula” company started cruises from Warsaw to Gdynia.³⁰ The

²⁵ *Konkurs na dom Z.P.N.P. w Warszawie*, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1930, no. 3, p. 86-98; 133-148.

²⁶ *Konkurs na gmach Związku Polskiego Nauczycielstwa Szkół Powszechnych*, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1930, no. 1, p. 80.

²⁷ *Gmach Związku Nauczycielstwa Polskiego w Warszawie*, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1933, no. 5, p. 133.

²⁸ G., *Na marginesie konkursu na dom Zw. Polskiego Nauczycielstwa Szkół Powszechnych*, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1930, no. 1, p. 78.

²⁹ „Kurier Warszawski” 1931, no. 217, after: A. Skalimowski, Z. Tucholski, op. cit., p. 79.

³⁰ The trippers went on a Vistula ship to Tczew and then changed to the seaship *Carmen*: J. S. Majewski, *Bulwar pelen przystani*, „Gazeta Stołeczna”, suplement to „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 18.07.1996, (18 July), p. 7.

1920s witnessed a growing popularity of water sports and sunbathing. Beaches and swimming places were located mainly on the right bank of the Vistula (Fig. 13). In the season there was even a special tourist barge moored in the middle of the river.³¹ Between the railway bridge and the Poniatowski Bridge there were many harbours of sport clubs, among them the Academic Sport Club³² (Fig. 14). Swimming marathons as well as rowing and canoeing regatta were organized (Fig. 15).³³ New elite clubs emerged, e.g. the Officer Yacht Club, whose luxurious seat, designed by Juliusz Nagórski, inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture, was built in 1930-32 (Fig. 16).³⁴ The banks of Vistula were at that time a place of the cult of the healthy, tanned, fit body. Still, the sporting infrastructure was underdeveloped, far from the scale of the "La Isla" centre in Madrid, designed by Luis Gutiérrez Soto, built in 1931 on an island on the Manzanares river.

In the inter-war period Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie was not only a place for walks, sunbathing and water sports, but also for mass events. Some of them, e.g. the Midsummer Night's Eve, organized by the Warsaw Rowing Society since 1882, were particularly sumptuous in the 1930s, with fireworks displays, and ships and the bridges illuminated (Fig. 17). In mid-October, on the other hand, Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie turned into a "motoring park" of the Warsaw Automobile Club, hosting an event that was particularly popular in the 1930s. The upper terrace was the start of the Warsaw-Gdynia-Warsaw car race for women (Fig. 18). Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie also witnessed patriotic celebrations, for instance on 5 August 1934 delegates to the 2nd World Meeting of Poles Living Abroad held a ceremony of blessing the standards of the Association of Poles in Germany.

In the late 1930s the Marine and Colonial League intensified actions aimed at stressing the symbolic

links between the riverbank of the capital and the "Polish sea coast" – the port of Gdynia, the show-piece of the modernizing Poland, and Gdańsk/Danzig, a city that was a bone of political contention. The League was founded in 1930; it propagated the ideas of "a marine Poland" and "creating marine society". It also supported water sports; for instance since 1933 it organized canoe trips "Through Poland to the sea".³⁵ In 1938 it had 889 000 members.

Colonialism was not part of the official ideology in the late 1930s, still colonial projects and dreams were supported by the government. The League was useful in that respect; it encouraged masses to support the ideas of Poland's rights to Danzig and access to the sea, regulating the Vistula, developing river navigation and trade. A navigable and regulated Vistula was one of the slogans of Piłsudski's followers. In the 1930s it was often stressed that the cities on the Vistula, especially Warsaw, were "spiritually linked" with the Baltic Sea. In the 1930s the government supported the League in organizing the Festival of the Sea, celebrated for the first time on 31 July 1932 in Gdynia. In the following year it became an all-Poland celebration. Since 1937 the Week of the Sea was celebrated, later renamed Days of the Sea. The festival combined elements of national, religious and folk celebrations, embracing masses, speeches, rallies, parades and fairs. It was an occasion to create occasional architecture, banners and models.³⁶

In Warsaw the Days of the Sea were celebrated in Piłsudski Square and Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie (fig. 19); the latter was treated as a symbolic link with Kościuszko Square in Gdynia, the place of the main ceremony. The journal *Morze* [The Sea] described the 1938 festival in detail, covering both the events in Gdynia and Orłowo, with an illumination of warships, and the celebrations in Warsaw. "A similar atmosphere was witnessed in the capital city, which,

³¹ The National Digital Archive (Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe, henceforth: NAC), signature 1-U-7424.

³² R. Gawkowski, *Dawnych przystani wioślarskich czar, czyli nadwiślańska rekreacja warszawiaków w II Rzeczypospolitej*, „Rocznik Warszawski” 2011, no. 1, p. 40-56.

³³ Photographs from NAC: signatures 1-S-2731-1; 1-S-3494-2. A selection of photos from NAC documenting recreation on the Vistula has been published [in:] *Bez troski nad Wisłą*, „Karta” 2011, no. 67, p. 37-40.

³⁴ M. Tomiczek, *Stołeczny Oficerski Jacht-klub R.P nad Wisłą*, [in:] *Miasto tyłem do rzeki*, Materiały Sesji Naukowej Warszawa 22-23 czerwca 1995, ed. B. Wierzbicka, Warszawa 1996, p. 152-157. Waclaw Królikowski wrote in „Dom Osiedle

Mieszkanie” that the building blocked the natural route of the future N-S carriageway: W. Królikowski, *Duch jurydyk*, „Dom Osiedle Mieszkanie” 1932, no. 2, p. 9-10. The building was damaged during the siege of Warsaw in 1939. In November 1939 the municipal authorities wanted to pull it down: M. Tomiczek, op. cit., p. 156. Nowadays the only trace of the Yacht Club are overgrown tennis courts.

³⁵ A. Szczerski, *Modernizacje. Sztuka i architektura w nowych państwach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej 1918-1939*, Łódź 2010, p. 231-233.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 236. See also: T. Białas, *Geneza i charakter obchodów Dni Morza*, „Nautologia” 1977, no. 4.

apparently far from the Baltic, is linked with via the core of our land, the Vistula river. On the eve of 29th June the city was covered in flags. Piłsudski Square and Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie lit up with national colours.”³⁷ On 29th June in Piłsudski Square there was a mass rally which gathered activists of the League but also representatives of the Polish Navy. This was the official part of the celebrations, with speeches that stressed the need to strengthen the navy. Then the crowd marched towards the Vistula to hear mass on Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie and to watch a “water parade”. The parade was observed from the deck of the *Kościuszko* ship by Antoni Roman, Minister of Industry and Trade, and Zygmunt Kamiński, President of the Warsaw Division of the League. The public gathered on the boulevard and on board of the *Bajka* ship, cheering the parading motorboats, canoes and rowboats, carrying banners with slogans supporting the regulation of the Vistula. In the evening there were mass outdoor parties in Warsaw, with edifices and monuments specially illuminated.³⁸

In 1939 the Festival of the Sea had even more momentum. In Gdynia there was a mass celebration with a parade and “the first ever in Poland naval review”, during which new warships were blessed by August Hlond, the Primate of Poland. Warsaw organized a slightly less ostentatious ceremony, still about 60 000 people gathered at Piłsudski Square.³⁹ “Then a huge march set off to Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie, accompanied by a military orchestra to join an open-air mass at a beautiful altar decorated with stylized anchors. At noon megaphones were switched on to broadcast a speech by the President of the Republic.”⁴⁰ A particularly notable part of the decoration was a banner with the slogan “Through the Vistula to the sea – through the sea to the whole world”.

In the early 1930s Jerzy Loth wrote about “two worlds on the Vistula” – that of workers and that of holiday sunbathers.⁴¹ On the lower terrace sand-digging machines worked next to wooden harbours and modern seats of water sport clubs (cf. fig. 15, 16). In the late 1930s this was changing; the process

was thus described by Henryk Orleański in *Kurier Warszawy* [The Courier of Warsaw]: “The Vistula, a wide ribbon cutting through the city, is a huge ventilator, a large reservoir of fresh air and sunshine for the city centre, therefore it should be accessible to the public, it should be a place for recreation and walking.”⁴² “Sand-vendors, fences, rowing clubs’ sheds, and old ruins are vanishing. Their places are taken by beautiful stone-paved boulevards, lawns and flowerbeds, neat asphalt roadways. It is enough to take a stroll along Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie or Wybrzeże Gdyńskie on a sunny day to realize how many people in need of recreation are attracted by the beautifully done embankment of the queen of Polish rivers,” reads the article.⁴³ Its author dreamt about embankments beautified by “numerous illuminated statues”.⁴⁴ This sort of narration, showing redevelopment as a modern tool, a scalpel removing “the city’s sore” (nota bene Powiśle was called so by Bolesław Prus in his newspaper “Kroniki” [Chronicles] already in the 1870s) and the “dirty picturesqueness”, and this sort of coalition of urban planners with municipal authorities, aimed at replacing chaos with order, beautifying space, regulating transport and streamlining crowds, was often witnessed in urban redevelopment projects in the 1930s. Let us only recall the fascist project of redeveloping Rome, the Stalinist “New Moscow 1937” and the plan of redeveloping Barcelona from the time of the Second Republic.

The authorities of Warsaw planned to remove sand- and gravel- vendors from Powiśle and to build a special dock for them away from the city centre. They also wanted to introduce more order to the chaotic premises of over fifty rowing clubs, planning to demolish shabby old sheds and fences, and in their stead to offer Varsovians a new water sports centre in Siekierki, planned as part of a larger establishment, The Park of Sport,⁴⁵ more reminiscent of the Recreation City for Barcelona (designed by GATCPAC, 1931) than of Foro Mussolini in Rome.

City development plans prepared by the municipal council in the years 1916–1939, starting with

³⁷ W. K., *Po Dniach Morza*, „Morze” 1938, issue 8, p. 11.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ J. Lewandowski, *Po Dniach Morza*, „Morze i Kolonie” 1939, no. 8, p. 4-8.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 9.

⁴¹ J. Loth, *Wisła w życiu dzisiejszej Warszawy*, „Kronika Warszawy” 1930, issue 4-5, p. 8-20.

⁴² H. Orleański, *Wisła w Warszawie*, „Kronika Warszawy” 1939, issue 1, p. 64.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 59-63.

Tadeusz Tołwiński's regulation plan from 1916, through the 1922–1926 version, to the so-called Różański's plan, all assumed that the Vistula would be the axis of the city, with the river basin and embankment being key elements of its layout. After 1935 one of the major tasks of the Department of City Planning, organized by Stefan Starzyński, the mayor of Warsaw, and headed by Stanisław Różański, was to tidy up the river banks, which was recorded e.g. in the General Plan of Developing the City of Warsaw from 1938.⁴⁶ The Vistula was to be the vital “airing channel” and a major “transportation artery” of the city. The council intended to regulate the river. The 1935 publication *Warszawa przyszłości* [The Warsaw of the future] included impressive visions of motorboats and river buses running regularly between Siekierki and Bielany with stops at the Royal Castle and Wybrzeże Kościuszkowkie.⁴⁷

In 1938 Stefan Starzyński wrote: “Facing the Vistula – it is a slogan that has caught on and is consistently implemented by the Board [...]. The works initiated in 1935 progress every year. [...] Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie is almost fully spruced up and asphalted.”⁴⁸ In the mid-30s the Board of the City led by Starzyński planned to build transport arteries along the Vistula, to extend the boulevards and to continue erecting monumental buildings on the embankment. There was also the idea of the “N-S-bis” route, an artery that was supposed to include the modernized Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie and the new parts of the embankment: Wybrzeże Gdańskie and Wybrzeże Gdyńskie. Only a half-kilometer fragment of Wybrzeże Gdańskie was completed before WW II (1st stage: 1935–1937).⁴⁹ Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie itself was supposed to become one of the major exits of the city: “There will be a new alley leading from Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie up the river to Wilanów. This artery will provide the best connection with the great park of sport in Siekierki [...]”.⁵⁰

The division into the ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ town was to be finally abolished due to a new interchange planned below the embankment. An enhanced connection between Powiśle and the centre of the city, and at the same time a symbolic connection between Warsaw and the Vistula was to be provided by an extension of Oś Saska [The Saxon Axis]. The competition for the design of redeveloping Saski Square was won by Kazimierz Tołłoczko and Jan Kukulski, whose idea was to open the city centre towards the Vistula through a new square planned between Karowa Street and the Visitationist Church. Under Saski Square, Krakowskie Przedmieście and the new square they wanted to have a wide tunnel, which having left the embankment would have become an open dual carriageway leading to a new bridge.⁵¹ Thanks to many exits from this artery Powiśle would have turned into “the lower city centre”. Thus, a “reborn Powiśle” would soon have developed into a quarter “with modern boulevards and public buildings”, properly connected with the city centre and the future Aleja Na Skarpie [the Alley on the Embankment].⁵²

The power plant

“Adjacent to the bustling and busy city centre lies an area of its own character, lagging behind the ‘upper town’. Still, even here modernity has been creeping in after Poland regained independence [...]”, wrote Franciszek Galiński in 1937.⁵³ He drew his readers’ attention to newly completed or still unfinished elegant buildings at Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie. Large stretches of land on the Vistula bank between the Poniatowski Bridge and the Kierbedź Bridge were the property of the city, which allowed the authorities to plan for new investments after buying just a few private plots. A major obstacle in transforming Powiśle was the City Power Plant, owned by the French Compagnie d’Electricité de

⁴⁶ A. Jankiewicz, J. Porębska-Srebrna, *Tradycje urbanistyczne Warszawy*, [in:] *Straty Warszawy 1939–45*, ed. W. Fałkowski, Warszawa 2005, p. 40-46.

⁴⁷ *Warszawa przyszłości*, Warszawa 1935, p. 34.

⁴⁸ S. Starzyński, *Rozwój stolicy*, Warszawa 1938, [in:] *Dzieje Mazowsza i Warszawy. Wybór źródeł*, Warszawa 1973, p. 347.

⁴⁹ A. Skalimowski, Z. Tucholski, op. cit., p. 78-79.

⁵⁰ *Rozwój południowych dzielnic Warszawy (1934–1938)*, Warszawa 1938, p. 19. A 160-hectare Sport forum” in Siekierki was planned to be an extensive complex with a regatta course, a large stadium, a parachute tower and football pitches. Its model was presented at the exhibition “Warszawa wczoraj, dziś, jutro”

[Warsaw yesterday, today and tomorrow] (drawings are in the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw).

⁵¹ The tender was discussed by: M. Czapelski, *Bohdan Pniewski – warszawski architekt XX wieku*, Warszawa 2008, p. 79-83; J. Trybuś, *Warszawa niezaistniała. Niezrealizowane projekty urbanistyczne i architektoniczne dwudziestolecia międzywojennego*, Warszawa 2012, p. 189-204.

⁵² *Opis projektu nr. 29. Arch. Kazimierz Tołłoczko i Jan Kukulski. Nagr. 1. Założenie projektu*, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1935, no. 3-4, p. 67-70.

⁵³ F. Galiński, *Gawędy o Warszawie*, Warszawa 1937, p. 231.

Varsovie. In the very heart of a redeveloping area, next to a green boulevard there was a huge industrial complex, partly walled in. Along the lower terrace of Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie between the Kierbedzia Bridge and Lipowa Street there were railway tracks used to deliver coal and to take away cinder and ash.⁵⁴ (Interestingly, this delivery line survived until 1974). The French company did not respect the council's plans of redeveloping Powiśle. Since 1927 it was in conflict with the municipal authorities, resolved only in July 1936, when the court ruled that the council was to take over the plant paying the company a compensation.⁵⁵ The council intended to spruce up this area, as was noted in *Kronika Warszawy* in 1938: "As Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie is now becoming the most beautiful part of the city [sic!] and the power plant does not count among its ornaments, the authorities decided not to extend the Power Plant at Leszczyńska Street [...]"⁵⁶

On 10 June 1938 the Board of the Power Plant and the municipal council held a press conference to announce that "demand for electricity is soaring". In 1938 Warsaw noted a 50% rise in electricity consumption in comparison to 1937. The growing demand was supposed to be met by a new power plant in Żerań.⁵⁷ As it was to be completed only in the early 1940s⁵⁸ there were attempts at modernizing the Powiśle plant. In 1938 its 80-metre-high chimney was pulled down; smoke-reduction systems and new turbines were installed. There were also plans of integrating the plant with the boulevard, e.g. by restructuring the switching station located at Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie and Boiler House III at Leszczyńska Street according to Jan Tokarze-

wski's design, which would have had them turned into one elegant complex with a rounded corner (Fig. 20). The old industrial brick buildings were to become part of Monumental Warsaw: "At Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie there are works going on in the switching station. A superstructure will be added to produce extra space, at the same time levelling the height of the whole building. Using this opportunity, the elevation will also be altered, elegant limestone replacing bricks. When this enterprise is completed, 82 meters of Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie will be lined with a highly presentable building."⁵⁹

An important enterprise of the Power Plant was the construction of an office building at the crossing of Wybrzeże Kosciuszkowskie and Tamka Street (Fig. 21). Stefan Starzyński wrote about it in his book *Rozwój stolicy* [The Development of the Capital]: "The new office building of the Power Plant will have an elegant sandstone elevation; all the Power Plant buildings will be restructures and redecorated, including the dreadful ruins of the unfinished swimming pool at Leszczyńska Street"⁶⁰

The office building was designed by Czesław Jabłoński, an architect, and Józef Korszyński, a civil engineer. The construction started in October 1937. The building was to "house all the offices of the company, now scattered in five places around the city. Only the district customer service offices will stay in their current locations"⁶¹ Completed in the spring of 1939,⁶² it was a reinforced-concrete construction with foundations based on concrete stilts⁶³ and many modern conveniences: fast lifts, its own telephone exchange and an underground shelter.⁶⁴ Its most elegant interior is a large multi-storeyed

⁵⁴ *Ku upamiętnieniu dziesięciu lat samorządu stolicy w Niepodległej Polsce 1918–1928*, p. 345.

⁵⁵ J. Koźmiński, *Elektrownia warszawska. Zarys czterolecia 1935–1938*, „Kronika Warszawy” 1938, no. 4, p. 236–250. For the history of the lawsuit see: T. Klarner, *Elektrownia Warszawska: zarys historyczny sporu Gminy m.st. Warszawy z Towarzystwem Elektryczności w Warszawie*, Warszawa 1936.

⁵⁶ J. Koźmiński, op. cit., p. 263.

⁵⁷ *Rozwój elektrowni*, „Głos Miast” 1938, no. 10, p. 14.

⁵⁸ The authorities of Warsaw had at their disposal a 16-hectare plot. In 1938 it was assumed that the new power plant would be ready "in three years at the earliest" (*Rozwój elektrowni*, „Głos Miast” 1938, no. 10, p. 14). In the middle of 1938 the levelling of the ground was started in Żerań and a special canal was built: *Działalność Elektrowni Miejskiej*, „Głos Miast” 1938, no. 16, p. 9. It was decided that the new power plant should be located near the Żerań port. The new plant would have made it possible to control the lighting of the whole city, e.g. to switch off the power supply in the event of bombing: J. Koźmiński, op. cit., p. 273.

⁵⁹ *Działalność Elektrowni Miejskiej*, „Głos Miast” 1938, no. 16, p. 9.

⁶⁰ S. Starzyński, *Rozwój stolicy*, Warszawa 1938, [in:] *Dzieje Mazowsza i Warszawy. Wybór źródeł*, Warszawa 1973, p. 347.

⁶¹ W. Szwander, *Uroczystość poświęcenia fundamentów nowego gmachu administracyjnego oraz uruchomienia nowego turbozespołu w elektrowni miejskiej w Warszawie*, „Przegląd Elektrotechniczny” 1937, no. 21, p. 1024.

⁶² J. Koźmiński, op. cit., p. 274.

⁶³ The construction was designed by a team led by Józef Korszyński. The technical documentation of the building from 1937–1938 is available in the archives of RWE Polska S.A., 41 Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie.

⁶⁴ Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych do Zarządu Miejskiego [Ministry of Internal Affairs to the City Board]. „Projekt schronu pgaz. W nowym gmachu Elektrowni Miejskiej w Warszawie”, 30 August 1937, copy from the archives of RWE Polska S.A., 41 Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie.

atrium with square pillars of white-veined dark marble facing.

Until now the building has remained a space-structuring element in this part of Powiśle, giving the exit of Tamka Street a grandiose look. It has two long elevations (the eastern one, facing Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie, has 18 axes, the northern one, facing Tamka Street, has 17 axes). The main entrance, facing the boulevard, is accentuated with five narrow lesenes (which is reminiscent of Rudolf Świerczyński's designs from the 1930s). The monumental air of the building, so characteristic of the Polish architecture of that period, is softened by a rounded corner, close to the "Streamline Moderne" aesthetics. It is made more dynamic by a rounded corner with a glass-covered staircase facing Tamka Street (Fig. 22). Moving this fragment away from the corner, and contrasting it with the simple modular elevations, created an effect reminiscent of the aesthetics of Erich Mendelsohn's designs from the turn of the 1930s.

In the Warsaw Power Plant office building, similar to Mendelsohn's department stores, "light is used as a building material".⁶⁵ In urban space the effect of moving the masses and creating a column of light, achieved by lighting the corner, was a symbol of modernizing Powiśle as well as of the policy of "electrifying Warsaw". After 1936 the municipal authorities launched the project of "electricity management" and "increased electricity consumption", aiming at levels of consumption characteristic of West European cities. To popularize the use of electric devices and speed up electrification, special reduced prices were introduced for private consumers. The Power Plant organized shows, e.g. the famous "Show Salon" in 1937, designed by Jadwiga Ostrowska, Janusz Ostrowski and Zygmunt Stępiński, held in Herse's house at Kredytowa Street.⁶⁶ For the municipal authorities speedy electrification was necessary to make Warsaw a real metropolis; electricity was to give life to Monumental Warsaw, providing a commuter railway line, underground, traffic lights, illumination of public

edifices, skyscraper lifts, neon signs and modern shop windows.

The modernization of Powiśle in the 1930s

The municipal authorities' plan for Powiśle in the second half of the 1930s was based on the following premises: industry was to be moved to the north while harbours and sport facilities to the south; boulevards were to be preserved and modern housing estates and monumental public buildings were to be erected along the embankment. In the late 1930s luxurious houses started to be built in Powiśle (Fig. 23). For instance, at Smulikowskiego Street (for some time called Herbutowska Street) a high-standard housing complex was built in 1936–1939 (Fig. 24). Its characteristics are: no outbuildings, halls with staircases, greenery in the courtyards, sandstone-faced elevations, high-quality finishing, decorative details (postboxes, doorbells) (Fig. 25, 26). Particularly interesting in this stylistically unified complex of houses of similar size is Abraham Gepner's house at 10 Smulikowskiego St, designed by Jerzy Gelbard and Roman Sigalin, with trapezoid bay windows, a trademark of this team of architects.⁶⁷ Worthy of attention are also the house at 13 Smulikowskiego St, with incurved balconies (designed by Julian Lisiecki and Janusz Krauss), and the neighbouring house on the corner of Tamka Street, built in 1937–1938 by the Insurance Section of the Warsaw-Białystok Medical Association (Fig. 27).⁶⁸ The house, designed by Bohdan Pniewski, was decorated with sculptures by Stanisław Rzecki and Józef Klukowski (only a fragment of relief showing a deer has survived until today on the elevation facing Tamka Street). Along with Bartoszewicza Street, Aleja Przyjaciół and Konopnickiej Street, Smulikowskiego Street is now one of the best preserved examples of luxurious Warsaw housing from the 1930s and should be carefully conserved.

In the 1930s modernity found its way into Powiśle, preparing to expand in the following decade. Still, until 1939 Powiśle remained an area of unde-

⁶⁵ Architecture critic Wilhelm Lotz, 1928, on modernist department stores, especially those designed by Erich Mendelsohn: W. Lotz, *Licht und Beleuchtung*, Berlin: Reckendorf 1928, p. 40, qtd after: K. James-Chakraborty, *German Architecture for a Mass Audience*, London, New York: Routledge 2000, p. 87.

⁶⁶ The Show Salon organized training in using electric cookers. A description of the Salon in: *Jadwiga i Janusz Ostrowscy, Zygmunt Stępiński, arch. arch. – Salon Demonstracyjny Elektrowni*

Warszawskiej, „Architektura i Budownictwo” 1937, no. 11-12, p. 435-445.

⁶⁷ It was not a particularly original solution. Such forms were applied by Michel Roux-Spitz in luxurious Paris houses in the mid-1920s.

⁶⁸ M. Czapelski, op. cit., sp 134-136.

financed status, with luxurious new apartment blocks next to 19th-century tenement houses, and impressive public buildings next to old brick factories, warehouses, inns and granaries (Fig. 28, 29). The district was to be finally transformed by projects connected with the 1944 National Exhibition, which were started in 1930 but gained momentum only in the late 1930s. Initially that propaganda event was planned for 1943; later it was decided to hold it in the spring of 1944 to commemorate the 25th anniversary of regaining independence.⁶⁹ A committee comprising architects, representatives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the City Board and the Ministry of Communications decided that Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie would be part of the 170-hectare exhibition area.⁷⁰

The 1934 exhibition design prepared by Juliusz Nagórski included two “exhibition bridges” and pavilions at Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie.⁷¹ In Nagórski’s 1938 drawing, preserved in the National Museum, there was still an “exhibition bridge” with pylons, which was to be built as an extension of Tamka Street, where the Świętokrzyski Bridge is situated now. In front of the Academy of Fine Arts and the ZNP complex (now Skwer Kahla), Nagórski wanted to locate one of the two “foreign pavilions”.⁷² The scale models, presented at the exhibition “Warsaw yesterday, today and tomorrow”, indicate the pavilion was to be no higher than the buildings at Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie.⁷³

Although the project was never carried out, in the 1930s Powiśle changed a lot. To prove that it is enough to compare two photographs. One of them, taken in July 1931, shows an unsupervised Praga beach and a fragment of Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie, with scattered buildings, among them

cooperative housing blocks; the panorama is dominated by the neo-renaissance gable of the Society for Supporting Folk Industry at Tamka Street and the power plant chimneys (Fig. 13). The other picture, from the early 1940s, shows a big-city frontage with modern simple geometric buildings: two three-storeyed houses (at 17 and 19 Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie), completed in 1938, soon before the outbreak of WW II, and the light facades of the ZNP and Power Plant buildings (Fig. 30).

Conclusion

The above-mentioned documentary *From Powiśle* shows the district just before another wave of modernization in the years 1960–1974. Until the end of the 1950s the area below the embankment, between Mariensztat Street and the Central Park of Culture (now known as Edward Śmigły-Rydz Park) remained in a peculiar limbo. There were still numerous burnt-out houses and factories, and fractions of surviving pre-war housing. There was even a project of creating a kind of open-air museum of ruins, with wrecks of armoured vehicles, in the vicinity of Radna, Dobra and Leszczyńska streets.⁷⁴ Modernization started only in the 1960s, with the building of new housing estates (e.g. “Radna”, designed by Zygmunt Stępiński, 1959–1966). According to the 1962 guidelines of the municipal authorities, the capital was to “face the Vistula” again, and Powiśle was to be “integrated with the city structure”.⁷⁵ This initiative, however, did not go beyond building new housing estates; fortunately, those fitted quite well into the surviving fragments of older architecture (e.g. Solec Street). Wisłostrada, the wide artery along the Vistula completed in 1974,

⁶⁹ J. Trybuś, op. cit., p. 43–65.

⁷⁰ “After over two months of work the committee presented its report on 22 June 1934, having unanimously concluded that the best site for the exhibition will be the area between Wał Miedzeszyński, the railway line, the Skaryszew backwater, Aleja Zieleniecka and Aleja Poniatowskiego. For the time of the world exhibition, the site should also embrace the trade port, the Paderewski Park, some of the area outside the Park and **the part of Wybrzeże Kościuszkowskie north of the Poniatowski Bridge, opposite the exhibition area in Praga** [emphasis added by the author]”: *Zarząd Miejski w m.st. Warszawie. Sprawozdanie za rok budżetowy 1.IV.1934 r. – 31.III.1935 r.*, Warszawa 1937, p. 83.

⁷¹ NAC, signature 1-M-655-1.

⁷² The National Museum in Warsaw, Section of Graphic Art and Modern Polish Drawing, signature. Rys.Pol.18943.

⁷³ The exhibition files are in the National Museum in Warsaw, Section of Iconography and Photography.

⁷⁴ B. Brzostek, *Za progiem. Codziennosc w przestrzeni publicznej Warszawy lat 1955–1970*, Warszawa 2007, p. 145.

⁷⁵ The resolution of conference of the Śródmieście Section of the Polish United Workers’ Party (24–25 Feb 1962) stressed that it was necessary „to liquidate disproportions between Powiśle and the other parts of the Śródmieście district”: *Dodatek PZPR Śródmieście i Prezydium DRN Śródmieście dla czytelników »Stolicy«, „Stolica”* 1963, no. 17, p. I–III. To achieve that, the „Powiśle” Urban-Planning Team was organized, headed by Jerzy Luba (with Zygmunt Stępiński and Adolf Ciborowski among the members). The main idea was to build new housing estates in Powiśle in 1965–1970: *ibidem*.

dreamt of by pre-war modernist architects, separated Powiśle from the river, just like the FDR Drive in New York or Moskvorieckaya Nabieriezhnaya in Moscow.

The idea of the city's return to the river was revived in the 1990s. Changes were initiated with the construction of the New Library of Warsaw University (designed by Marek Budzyński, 1994–1999). The “tunnel along the river”, i.e. restructuring a 900-meter-long part of Wisłostrada into an underground passage in 2001 (which had wrongly been contested), made it possible to revive a fragment of the quiet green boulevard between Lipowa nad Jaracza streets. Opening the Copernicus Science Centre (designed by RAR-2 Laboratorium Architektury, 2008–2011), the construction of the 2nd line of the underground (opened in March 2015) and the revitalization of the boulevard are further steps in Powiśle and Warsaw coming back to the Vistula again.

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