



Original text published in Polish:
Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka,
1999, vol. 54, nr 3, s. 285-299
PL ISSN 0037-7511

TERESA KULAK

**A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-German province?
A look at Wrocław at the turn of the 20th century**

When analysing the importance and role of Wrocław at the turn of the 20th century, we should start with reminding that the city was incorporated in the Kingdom of Prussia on the 7th November, 1741, after its authorities — together with all Silesian Estates — had sworn their allegiance to Frederick II (r. 1740–1786) during the 1st Silesian war between Prussia and Austria. In fact, the city was already taken on 10 September by Prussian troops marching through Silesia, and Frederick II acquired the title to Wrocław on 3rd January, 1741, under a neutrality agreement entered into with the city council¹.

Claiming Silesia meant that Prussia acquired Wrocław, the largest town of Silesia and one of the richest cities of the Habsburg Monarchy. It also put an end to the former Habsburg regime that had benefited Wrocław in two ways: as the meeting place of local Silesian authorities and as a city with extensive self-government. In 1741, the Military Field Commissariat became the highest governing body in Silesia, and Wrocław lost its ancient rights and privileges. In 1742, Frederick II declared Wrocław a fortress, which in practice meant that the newly established Magistrature (replacing the former city council) became subordinate to the commanding officer. To compensate for this loss of freedom and economic exploitation, Wrocław was appointed as King's residential city in 1742². Up until 1918 Wrocław remained the third capital of Prussia — after Königsberg and Berlin. It is worth noting that initially it was the richest of the three. For centuries, it had been a large craft and trade centre, transacting both in Europe and overseas. It specialised in cloth, fur, metal goods and cattle.

Historians have long disputed over the outcome of Frederick II's reign, emphasising either benefits or losses that the transfer of power from the Habsburgs to Hohenzollerns meant for Wrocław. The issue was raised already by the contemporaries, but all complaints, for example concerning the dramatic increase of taxes and tariffs or the restrictions of personal freedom, were dismissed with a statement that 'only with the current rule there have come prosperous times for Silesia'.³ Without attempting to resolve the issue here, we must emphasise that between 1740 and 1763 King of Prussia waged 3 wars over Silesia, bringing about damages, economic downturn and decrease in

¹ See also: J. Długoborski, J. Gierowski, K. Maleczynski, *Dzieje Wrocławia do 1807 r.*, Wrocław 1965; *Historia Śląska*, 1.1, part 3: *Od końca XVI w. do r. 1763*, K. Maleczynski, ed. Wrocław 1963.

² M. Morgenbesser, *Geschichte Schlesiens*, Breslau 1829, p. 360; see: *Die Kunstdenkmäler der Stadt Breslau*, L. Bürgermeister, ed., vol. I, part 1, Wrocław 1930, p. 22.

³ *Ist Schlesien vor dem Jahre 1618 bevölkerter und reicher gewesen als heut?* (Schlesische Provinzialblätter, 1786, No. 3, p. 502); see also: J. Demel, *Problematyka mieszczańska na lamach „Schlesische Provinzialblätter“ (1785- 1830)* (Studia z dziejów Śląska, vol. XX, Katowice 1992, p. 72).



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

population growth dynamics. At the outbreak of the 1st Silesian war, together with its suburbs the city had ca. 44,000 inhabitants, while at the close of Frederick's II reign (1785) the number only increased to 50,948 people, out of which 36,905 lived within the city walls⁴.

The new power system caused a total decline in the former ruling class. It was not only because the new Magistrature was operating in a system of dual subordination: firstly to the local state administration, from 1748 on called Wrocław Military and Domain Chamber, and secondly to the Minister of Silesia who reported directly to the King. What proved to be more problematic for the city was that many Magistrature and King officials were recruited from outside Silesia, mainly from Brandenburg⁵. Most frequently, they were retired military men or national officials, sometimes transferred in consequence of incompetence or embezzlement. Remuneration for city officials and fortress officers posed a significant burden upon Wrocław budget, as did the requirement to allot a certain amount, called city budget 'surplus', to the state treasury. The King secured high income himself but all financial obligations imposed in the end of Frederick's II reign generated a debt of nearly 900,000 thalers.

Frederick II took no heed of Wrocław economic interests, as he favoured Berlin, whose population increased by 1/3 during the 15 years of his reign (1740–1755), reaching over 120,000.⁶ In his *Geschichte Schlesiens*, published in 1829, Michael Morgenbesser, rector of the St Spirit School, clearly stated that Frederick did not like Wrocław because 'he always saw its aspirations for autonomy and took all measures to restrict its power, importance and income'⁷. Wrocław merchants were ruined by King's monopolies for salt, coffee and tobacco trade. In 1765, all bank agencies were closed down, and an office of Berlin State Bank (Landesbank) was opened. The King meticulously controlled the production in new manufactories to make sure they were not competing with new Berlin plants. Although in 1742, to stimulate trade in the city, he initiated a two-week market, but the event — introduced top-down, without a simultaneous concession on the high taxes and protective tariffs — was not successful. Furthermore, due to the presence of a large garrison, there was not enough storage and trading space for the merchants. In 1924, a special issue of the periodical of the Wrocław Chamber of Commerce clearly stated that the reign of Frederick II 'was an ordeal for Wrocław trade'. In 1782 the economic situation reached the bottom, as 'the marketplaces stood empty, and merchants became a rarity', while 'all legitimate complaints made no impression on the King'⁸.

Also the army that was stationed in Wrocław became a great financial burden for the citizens. The number of soldiers and officers, together with their families, was between 4,000 and 9,000. Not only had all citizens to pay a special tax (a so-called 'service') to maintain the army, but also those who occupied independent apartments were required to quarter soldiers. The reason was that the army did not use barracks,

⁴ E. Müller, *Die Altstadt von Breslau. Citybildung und Physionomie. Ein Beitrag zur Stadtgeographie*, Breslau 1931, p. 98.

⁵ *Ehemals und jetzt* (Schlesische Provinzialblätter, 1813, No. 57, p. 248).

⁶ See also: *Geschichte Berlins von Anfängen bis 1945*, Berlin 1987, p. 254.

⁷ Morgenbesser, *op. cit.*, p. 405. After his death in 1841 this passage was deleted in subsequent editions; see also *Ibidem, Geschichte von Schlesien*, H. Schubert, ed., 4th revised edition, Breslau 1908.

⁸ H. Wendt, *Die kaufmännische Standesvertretung in Breslau vor Begründung der Handelskammer (Die Handelskammer Breslau 1849-1924)*, Breslau 1924, p. 345).



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

the construction of which began in the Kępa Mieszczańska only after the Seven Years' War. The reign of Frederick II did not stimulate construction activity in the city. Between 1766 and 1774 the only new building was the classical Hatzfeld Palace, the work of construction adviser Karl Gotthardt Langhans. As a matter of fact, it was earmarked for army headquarters. All financial efforts were directed towards fortifying the city, which not only posed a burden on the finances, but also meant decreased arable and residential areas in the suburbs. And it was in the suburbs, outside the city walls and without the associated formal and economic restrictions, that manufactories were located, the harbingers of a new era and of the capitalistic economy.

Financial exploitation on the part of the state, and thriftlessness of the military-administrative city authorities left Wrocław in poor shape. The waterworks were out of order, the streets were not fixed and were rarely illuminated. Wrocław made an unfavourable impression on its visitors. In this context, the opinion of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is often cited, on 'a noisy, dirty and gloomy city', expressed in a letter to Johann Herder from 1790⁹. Ten years later, John Quincy Adams, an envoy to Berlin court, had similar impressions¹⁰.

Despite unfavourable conditions for managing Wrocław economy, important changes in the city's internal affairs gradually became visible. Wrocław played important administrative and political roles in the Hohenzollern Monarchy¹¹. City livened up each time the King paid a visit with his retinue. The attractions were military parades, balls and receptions; the 'Kalte Asche' theatre's auditorium was filled to its capacity. From 1702 Wrocław had its Leopoldina academy, St Elisabeth and St Maria Magdalena gymnasiums, and the centuries-old St Spirit School, joined in 1776 by the Evangelical Reformed gymnasium, named 'Friedrichsschule' in honour of the King. Vocational schools appeared only in the end of the 18th century. In 1789, 2 teaching colleges were established, educating teachers for village and city schools, and in 1791 the first public Jewish school was opened (Wilhelmsschule). Elementary education could be received in 29 parish and monastic school, including 22 protestant ones¹².

A key role in the development of intellectual life of the city was played by local intelligentsia: teachers, editors, some of provincial officials. First scientific publications on history, geography, etc, appeared. *Schlesische Zeitung* was one of the leading press titles, published by the Korn printing house from 1742. From 1785 the socio-economic journal *Schlesische Provinzialblätter* was published, and in 1800 the historic, ethnographic and literary journal *Der Breslauer Erzähler* was established. In 1800, the latter estimated that Wrocław had a population of 53,859, including 2832 Jews¹³. This meant an increase of only 9,000 people from 1741, while in the economically favoured Berlin the population doubled during the period¹⁴.

Frederick II's successors, nephew Frederick William II (r. 1786–1797) and his son Frederick William III (r. 1797–1840), did not exploit the city so heavily, abolishing the 'surplus' paid to the King's treasury, so Wrocław experienced some economic growth in

⁹ Długoborski, Gierowski, Maleczyński, *op. cit.*, p. 732.

¹⁰ J. Q. Adams, *Listy o Śląsku*, Wrocław 1992, pp. 95–98.

¹¹ J. Zimmermann, *Beytrage von Schlesien*, vol. XI, Brzeg 1793, p. 3.

¹² A. Galos, *Miasto od połowy XVIII wieku do roku 1945 (Wrocław, jego dzieje i kultura*, Z. Świechowski, ed., Warszawa 1978, p. 314).

¹³ *Briefe über Breslau* (Der Breslauer Erzähler, 1800, No. 8, p. 124).

¹⁴ *Geschichte Berlins*, p. 318.



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

the end of the 18th century¹⁵. The economic situation was greatly improved with the annexation of new territories after the Partitions of Poland. This opened up new perspectives for profitable and intensive growth in the dynamic manufacturing and trade sectors in the following decades¹⁶.

18th-century Wrocław consisted of two separate organisms: the inner city, encircled with walls, and the suburbs. Immersed in history and tradition, this ancient system was mightily changed by the French troops, which entered Wrocław on the 7th of January 1807, after a month-long siege, and on the orders of Napoleon, began demolishing the fortifications. According to a note in the then biweekly *Topographische Chronik von Breslau*, Wrocław citizens accepted, and even felt relieved about demolishing 'the useless and air-flow-blocking' medieval walls, they felt prisoners of¹⁷. The removal of fortifications had a major impact on spatial development of Wrocław as it freed the city from its medieval boundaries. Dated 19 November 1808, the Law on the Cities provided formal basis for joining the moat-encircled 'inner city' with its five suburbs: Świdnickie, Mikołajskie, Odrzańskie, Oławskie and Piaskowe. The city area increased nearly six times, to 2048 ha (previously the inner city covered only 133 ha, and 350 ha with the fortifications)¹⁸.

Defeats during the Napoleonic Wars forced Prussia to undertake many reforms. For Wrocław, an important regulation was a statute establishing rules for local government. Cities was to be ruled by an electable council, with Magistrature as the executive body. It was headed by the Oberbürgermeister, appointed for 12 years. The office was applicable only to those towns which, like Wrocław, fell into the category of 'large cities'. Wrocław grew in importance in the spring of 1813¹⁹ when Silesia became the area of military operations of French and Prussian armies, supported by Russian troops. During that time, the city was an informal capital of Prussia as Frederick William III moved his court to Wrocław to stay closer to the theatre of war. In the proclamation *Art mein Volk* from 17 March, the King of Prussia appealed to patriotism of his subjects and called for fight against the French occupant²⁰. It was believed that the events of the 'liberation war' gave Wrocław a prominent place in the history of Prussia and the Reich. It was only then that, according to J. Partsch, 'all Silesians became proud of their inextricable bounds with Prussia and the German Reich'²¹. Thus, the air of foreignness that had surrounded the city was gone.

After the Napoleonic Wars, an administrative reform was introduced, abolishing the previously distinct status of Silesia, and in 1816 Wrocław officially became the capital of the Silesian province. It was the largest of Prussian provinces (40,340 sq. km),

¹⁵ G. Margraf, *Finanz- und Verfassungsgeschichte Breslaus unter Friedrich Wilhelm II* (Zeitschrift des Vereins für Geschichte und Altertums Schlesiens, vol. XXVIII, 1894, pp. 1–18).

¹⁶ *Die Handelskammer Breslau 1840-1924*, pp. 74 and following.

¹⁷ [K. A. Menzel], *Zur Geschichte der Breslauschen Festungswerke* (*Topographische Chronik von Breslau*, 1808, No. 115).

¹⁸ *Breslau, Schlesiens Hauptstadt. Jahresbericht des Statistischen Amtes der Stadt Breslau*, 1933, p. 10; see K. Maleczyński, M. Morelowski, A. Ptaszycka, *Wrocław — rozwój urbanistyczny*, Warszawa 1956, pp. 129 and following.

¹⁹ J. Partsch, *Schlesien an der Schwelle und am Ausgange des XIX. Jahrhunderts*, Breslau 1903, p. 11.

²⁰ *Schlesische Priviligirte Zeitung*, 1813, No. 34; see: J. Stein, *Geschichte der Stadt Breslau im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*. Breslau 1884, pp. 39–40.

²¹ J. Partsch, *Schlesien. Eine Landeskunde für das deutsche Volk auf wissenschaftlicher Grurullage*, part 1: *Das ganze Land*, Breslau 1896, p. 24.



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

and it had 2,207,000 inhabitants²². Under the new legal circumstances, Wrocław enjoyed more extensive administrative functions and a higher position. From 1822, it was a seat of general commandment of the 6th Army Corps; in accordance with a statute of 1823, Provincial Diet was called in 1825. After the establishment of the University in 1811, Wrocław grew in importance in the area of science and culture, becoming one of academic centres of Prussia and the Reich²³.

1821 saw changes in the Diocese of Wrocław, which was detached from the See of Gniezno. It now covered Silesia, deaneries in Bohemia, as well as Berlin. Earlier, in 1817, the Lutheran and Calvinist churches were joined into one Evangelical State Church, with King as the supreme governor. On the provincial level, consistory was the highest authority. In 1844, superintendents acquired the highest authority in the province. It must be noted that Wrocław was home to authorities and theological schools of as many as 4 denominations: Catholics, Protestants, Old Lutherans and Jews²⁴. Jewish Theological Seminary was founded in 1853 as one of two schools of higher education for rabbis in Germany.

Freedom of industrial production, introduced by a statute in 1810, and freedom of trade on the state territory (established in 1818 with the removal of domestic tariffs), strengthened the position of Wrocław as an important trade centre of the early 19th century. Silesia resumed trade with neighbouring Poland, as well as with Ukraine, Hungary and Austria. Goods travelled through Galicia, and most importantly, from 1846, through the Republic of Cracow. Twice a year, many producers and merchants came to Wrocław from Eastern and Western Europe for two-week wool market. The market was very profitable for Wrocław, and the city gradually regained its position as a trade emporium.

The everyday life of affluent merchants was revolving around the stock market, located from 1824 in a representative classicist building designed by architect Karl Ferdinand Langhans at the Solny square. From 1803, the city's intellectual and economic elite was centred around the Society of National Culture Supporters (*Gesellschaft für vaterländische Kultur*), which in the following decades became involved in a multidimensional public interest activity, including nurturing municipal green space and developing industry and commerce²⁵. The organisation initiated the foundation of the Silesian Society of Arts, which engaged in such initiatives as much appreciated and popular in Wrocław exhibitions of painting. 1846 saw the birth of the Association for Research on the Antiquity and History of Silesia (*Verein für Geschichte und Altertum Schlesiens*), which besides studying the Silesian past, devoted much effort to creating the Museum of Silesian Antiquities, which was launched as late as in 1858.

From 1830s the city was undergoing major changes. This involved an accelerated process of industrialization and production mechanization as a result of the transformation of suburban manufactures into factories. At that time, Wrocław was flooded by a wave of emancipated, poverty-stricken peasants, whose presence changed

²² *Schlesien in Zahlen* (Statistische Sonderhefte der Zeitschrift Schlesien, 1939, vol. 3, p. 74).

²³ J. Conrad, *Das Universitätsstudium in Deutschland während der letzten 50 Jahre*, Jena 1884.

²⁴ J. G. Knie, *Alphabetisch-statistisch-topographische Übersicht der Dörfer, Flecken und andere Orte der Königliche Preussische Provinz Schlesien*, Breslau 1845, p. 788.

²⁵ For more details see: M. R. Gerber, *Die Schlesische Gesellschaft für vaterländische Cultur (1803-1945)* Sigmanggen 1988. Beihefte zum Jahrbuch der Schlesischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität zu Breslau, z. 9.



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

the city's social and professional structure. According to the national census of 1840, Wrocław was at that time home to the population of 97,664 people — this means that the city doubled its population only after a century of Prussian rule. A new stage in the development of Wrocław, which was then merely a provincial city, sparked into life together with the development of steam railway. A ceremonial opening of the first section of the Upper Silesian Railway Wrocław-Oława took place in 1842. Soon after, in 1843, in order to introduce transport connections between the cities of Lower Silesia, the construction of the 'Świebodzka' railway (Freiburger Bahn) was commenced. This was followed by the launch of the construction of the Lower Silesian railway (1844), which was to connect Wrocław with Berlin. The presence of railway and numerous railway stations within the city limits, induced the construction of kilometres of rails, railway embankments and viaducts, that brought about crucial changes in the city's landscape. Wrocław became the most important East German railroad junction. This was highly beneficial for the Świdnickie suburb, which from the 1870s had a larger population than Stare Miasto. In no time it was regarded as the hallmark of Wrocław.

It was the industrial revolution that spurred the flourish of the Oławskie suburb, a hub of manufacturing plants, mainly weaving mills and percale printing houses. The expansion of the Mikołajskie suburb took place some time later, from mid-19th century, with the development of the metallurgical industry. At the same time, locations such as the Odrzańskie and Piaskowe suburbs, populated by impoverished inhabitants, did not benefit much from the effects of the city's modernization. Both Market Square and its neighbouring streets were laid with pavements. A year earlier steam engines were included in the city's waterworks system. Gas lighting was introduced to Wrocław in 1847, when Wrocław gained its first gasworks. Street lights, cobbled roads and pavements gave the city a modern look. Its panorama was also embellished by the new public utility buildings. In 1844 Świdnicka street became home to the headquarters of the 6th Army Corps, and in 1845 Podwale gained a court and prison building complex. Also at that time, some adjustments were introduced to the buildings located in the area of the Market Square: 1863 saw the construction of a new Neo-Gothic-style Town Hall. Slightly earlier there were located 2 statues of Prussian rulers shown on horses: Frederick the Great (1847) and Frederick William III (1861). In 1867, a representative building of the new merchant stock market was erected by the moat at Krupnicza street. In the same year, slightly eastwards from the stock market, also by the moat, in the area of the former Sakwowy bastion (*Taschenbastion*) or the so-called Partisans Hill, a magnificent Italian Renaissance-style building called Belvedere was put into use by Adolf Liebich.

Due to the economic flourish of the city, its community of labourers, whose population was estimated in 1840s to 50,000, was rapidly growing. However, as a result of an increasing economic crisis of the time, it was difficult for them to find employment. The living conditions of the proletariat of Wrocław were extremely difficult, which was communicated to a wider public by the article of Wilhelm Wolff entitled *Casamates*²⁶. As the following years saw a major increase in poverty, all cases of public protests organized by the labourers, even the initiatives that were to show solidarity with the uprising of weavers from Pieszyce and Bielawa, were systematically quashed by the

²⁶ W. Wolff, *Wybór pism o Śląsku*, selected and translated by W. Długoborski, Warszawa 1954, pp. 130–136.



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

Prussian army. At the same time, the feelings of other social groups were becoming more and more radical. People demanded the introduction of constitution, democratization of political relations and access to public offices for the citizens. There is no doubt that Wrocław had an impact on the course of events of the European Revolutions of 1848 in the entire territory of Silesia²⁷. The force of the so-called Springtime of the Peoples contributed to the abolition of censorship (17th of March 1848) and brought forward the introduction of mainly left-wing press, which became an important factor in moulding public opinion, by envisioning the perspectives of freedom and introduction of democracy to Prussia. However, the rebellious attitude of the Wrocław burgesses started to tone down with the improvement of the state's economic situation and relaxation of its policy on internal affairs. Prussian government was deeply worried by the fact that the growth of the community of grand industrial labourers, hired mainly by the weaving, metallurgical, clothing and food industry, spurred the formation of radical organisations and associations, which intended to launch an organized campaign for social reforms.

In 1860, Wrocław entered a new phase of its development. The population of the 142,240-inhabitant city, living in the moat-surrounded area and the suburbs, finally became balanced (in 1858 as much as 46 percent of the entire Wrocław population lived outside the moat-surrounded area). According to German scholars, it was this particular moment in the history of Wrocław that marked the outset of the Old Town's transformation into a commercial and financial city centre²⁸. The fall in the number of inhabitants of the Old Town and the suburbs in favour of the external city quarters, which was increasingly evident in the following years, resulted in the fact that in 1914 their population amounted to 92 percent of the total population of Wrocław. In 1868, after a second territorial extension that took place in the 19th century, Wrocław's surface reached 3032 ha. This issue was discussed already in 1850, but the process was obstructed by a conflict of interests between the city and the authorities of the rural district of Wrocław, who objected to the extension for the fear of losing their tax revenues. With the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian War, in 1870, the total number of Wrocław inhabitants was 207,997, which proved that within the period of the past 30 years its population doubled once more. This boost was not, however, caused by the growing number of native city inhabitants but by the influx of population from the nearby villages and other cities of the Silesian province, as well as Poles from the Poznań province and Upper Silesia²⁹. The exact number of Poles living in Wrocław at the turn of the 19th and 20th century is unknown, however, according to the estimates their community amounted to 20,000, and the Census of 1905 informs that 8,927 of them declared to be Polish. Next to labourers, housemaids, petty merchants, and craftsmen, Wrocław was also home to a vast number of intellectual elite (doctors, engineers) and some landed gentry from Greater Poland and Pomerania. From 1811 the population of Polish students leapt at times to ca. 1/3 of the total number of students of the Wrocław University³⁰.

²⁷ Schneer, *op. cit.*, pp. 290–19.

²⁸ This issue is discussed in more detail by Muller, *op. cit.*, pp. 29 and following.

²⁹ M. Neefe, *Die Bevölkerung der Stadt Breslau (Breslau, Lage, Natur und Entwicklung, Breslau 1901, pp. 112)*.

³⁰ M. Pater, *Historia Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego do roku 1918, Wrocław 1997, pp. 214–216*.



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

The Unification of Germany (1871) did not impact the status of Wrocław, which was enjoying the position of Reich's third largest capital and royal residential city. Wrocław also remained the seat of the administrative authorities. It was home to the General Presidium of Silesia (*Oberpräsidium der Provinz Schlesien*), presidium of the government district (*Regierungsbezirk*) of Wrocław and the provincial union of Silesia (*Provinzialverband der Provinz Schlesien*), a central unit of local government managed by the general starost. The unification marked the boost in Reich's economic development. A considerable sum of the immense tribute imposed upon France was allotted to Wrocław, whose territory was between 1897 and 1911 repeatedly extended by smaller and larger suburban area. Before the outbreak of World War II, its total surface was 4920 ha, and it was populated by (excluding the ca. 6-thousand garrison) by 543,413 people. The dynamics of the demographic development of the city was not, however, as powerful as in the former period, because it took the city another 40 years from 1870 to double the number of its inhabitants. Yet, in 1885, Wrocław was still the third — after Berlin and Hamburg and before Leipzig and München— largest city of the Reich in terms of population, in 1890 moved to the 5th position in the ranking, and in 1910 — to 7th, outdistanced by Cologne and Dresden³¹. One must admit that Wrocław was actually bound to this degradation as a result of an erratic policy of the city's district authorities, reluctant towards all the plans of extending the city and averting the catastrophic housing shortage. The scale of the problem can be illustrated by the fact that the 588,000 population of Dresden was occupying the area of 10,740 ha, which was 2,5 times larger than the territory of the then Wrocław, and Cologne, with its 715-thousand population, had a territory of 25,719 ha³². The fault for this unfavourable situation of Wrocław was placed by the inhabitants on the state authorities, which were reluctant to introduce legal measures that would force the rural communes to cooperate with the urban agglomeration. As a result, the dynamically developing city of Wrocław lost its former Reich-wide importance, and was degraded to a position of the largest city east from Berlin.

During the development of its internal infrastructure after 1871 municipal investments were given priority over the construction of public utility buildings. This approach was maintained until the mid-1880s, and from 1885 more emphasis was placed on developing representative buildings, which were to add to Wrocław some metropolitan flair. First and foremost step in the modernisation of Wrocław was providing the city with sufficient supplies of gas and water. The number of gasworks was extended from one (operating since 1847) to four (the three new ones were built in 1864, 1881 and 1902). The waterworks and the sewage system were completed in the suburbs until 1881, and both the new intakes and the water tower were built in 1871 and 1904 to cater for the needs of the rapidly growing population. The city was also in need of new solutions in terms of public transport and communication infrastructure. In the 1870s, main streets were paved with granite cobblestone, and at the same time gutters were liquidated. From 1844 among the means of transport around the city were horse cabs. 1862 saw the first stagecoaches and 1876 — first horse tram, which gave rise to the municipal system of public transport. Two years after Wrocław gained its first power station (1891), the city welcomed its first electric tram. From 1906 one could use

³¹ In 1929, Wrocław was relocated to the 8th position in the ranking, after Essen, cf.: Müller, *op. cit.* p. 36.

³² *Die Stadt Breslau. Die Eingemeindung und Erweiterung ihres Gebieten. Denkschrift des Magistrats, Breslau 1925.*



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

the services of taxicabs and in 1910 Wrocław became the first city in Germany whose fire brigades were equipped with fire trucks. At that time in Wrocław there were also several public phone booths, for telephones were introduced to the city as early as 1881.

The city's riverbank location called for building numerous bridges and overpasses, even after the Oława Miejska moat was eventually filled in, Wrocław was still a city of 83 over-water constructions. In the turn of the 19th and 20th century many new bridges were constructed and some of the old ones modernized. Most interesting from the architectural point of view were the Piaskowy bridge (1861), Tumski bridge (1889) and Zwierzyniecki bridge (1895). A firm proof for the technical advancement was the Imperial bridge (1910), currently called the Grunwaldzki bridge. Also the main roads of inter-municipal transport were modernized: the one leading southwards from Wrocław — currently named Powstańców Śląskich (*Kaiser Wilhelmstr.*), westwards — Legnicka (*Lrankfurterstr.*) and northwards — Szczytnicka (*Scheitnigerstr.*).

From mid-1880s together with the systematic modernisation of municipal facilities, the authorities were focusing mainly on erecting representative buildings of public utility. At the same time, there could be observed a leap in the number of private investments concentrated mostly on developing a highly lucrative tenement housing segment. In the suburban areas, especially on the right-riverbank Odrzańskie and Piaskowe suburbs, there were introduced blocks of mostly 4-storey tall tenement houses. In 1904, Wrocław gained a 6th suburb called Strzelińskie, located to the south east from the Main Train Station. In 1912, the immensely developed Świdnickie suburb was divided in two parts. Its further extension was carried out according to a detailed plan, developed in 1868, and its main artery, *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Strasse*, was an impressive grand-scale project. Soon, many public institutions and offices were transferred to this prestigious location, like for instance the Highest Miner's Court, the army and many state consulates (before the World War II there were 20 of them)³³.

Despite the extension of the city limits, Wrocław's centre was still the Old Town, which, lying in the very heart of a concentric street arrangement, was a metropolitan hub. As soon as in 1875, the Old Town housed 3/5 of the total number of Wrocław shops, and the ground floors of the Market Square tenement houses constituted a continuous stretch of commercial establishments. The area located within the moat limits was soon transformed into a modern business centre, with plenty of shops, banks and commercial agencies. As the medieval buildings did not satisfy the demands of modernity, they were knocked down with no regard to their historic and architectonic value. After the Market Square was reorganized, there was no more place for the traditional annual fairs or for the market stalls with fruit and vegetables. In 1908 they were transferred to the two newly built city-funded market halls.

Wide streets and modern buildings gave the city a new, metropolitan character. Impressive houses of state offices and provincial bodies, museums and the City Library (1891) proved that the capital of Silesia was a wealthy and well managed city. Oberbürgermeister Georg Bender (1891–1912) played a major role in the spatial reconstruction of Wrocław and the transformation of the city's image³⁴. It was thanks to his caution and aesthetic vision that Wrocław became a metropolis. He transformed

³³ R. Gelles. *Konsulaty we Wrocławiu wczoraj i dziś*, Wrocław 1996.

³⁴ A. Heilberg, *Breslau großstädtische Entwicklung unter Georg Bender (1891—1912) (Festgabe des Vereins für Geschichte Schlesiens zum siebzigsten Geburtstag seines Ehrenmitgliedes Oberbürgermeisters a. D. dr phil. et med. h.c. Georg Bender*, Breslau 1918, pp. 9–37).



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

Wrocław into a 'garden city', approaching the issue of urban greenery in terms of recreation and health, as well as designing the urban space in an aesthetic manner. In the beginning of the century, trees were planted along nearly 50 km of streets, and ca. 500 ha of parks were arranged, created or upgraded. The largest and oldest of them, the Szczytnicki park became a popular place of entertainment for both citizens and visitors, when in 1865 on its eastern edge the Zoological Garden was built, followed by horse and cycling tracks.

The importance of the city resulted not only from its function as the provincial capital, but also from the fact that it had become a large industrial centre, a hub for trade between Eastern and Southern Europe, home to modern stock exchange, shareholder organisations and companies. Wrocław also had a huge railway junction and was a hub for road transport. Initially, the Oder waterway was of lesser importance to the city but regulation works that were conducted in 1888 upgraded downstream sections of the river and opened connections with Hamburg and Szczecin. The construction of the navigation channel and the Popowice port (1901) created a navigable waterway around the city.

Wrocław played an important role and had significant economic potential in the machine, textile, leather and shoe manufacturing industries. The Linke-Hoffmann-Werke conglomerate employed nearly 6500 people in 1913 and ranked among largest plants of this kind in Germany. Bolt factory Archimedes (Archimedes Stahl- und Eisenwerke) experienced similarly dynamic growth, exporting its products to Russia, Middle East and South Africa. As far as the clothing industry in Prussia was concerned, Wrocław was second only to Berlin³⁵. The industry used the services of many outworkers, mainly women, and Wrocław boasted the highest employment rate in the Reich.

Numerous offices and economic institutions attracted many state officials, self-government functionaries, and representatives of various trade organisations, who shaped the face of the city and built its cultural and academic community. Wrocław science and culture stimulated Silesia and the neighbouring lands. For nearly 100 years, its scientific activity remained connected chiefly with the University³⁶ but new schools started to appear in the beginning of the century, such as the Construction School (1903), and the School for Fine Arts and Handicraft became an academy in 1912. The most significant event, however, was the establishment of the Higher Technical School in 1910, whose task was to educate specialists for the industry of Higher Silesia. Wrocław also had 6 gymnasiums, including 1 catholic and 1 Jewish gymnasium and 2 'realschules', as well as many vocational schools. 1914, there were a total of 147 city public schools (including 87 evangelical and 60 catholic ones), with over 50 new school buildings constructed from the beginning of the century.

An important cultural and academic role was played by museums of various profiles and sizes. The two most prominent were the Silesian Museum of Modern Art and the Silesian Museum of Handicraft and Antiquity. The city life was greatly influenced by the press as virtually each political party, trade organisation and professional union (teachers, doctors, etc.) published their own titles. From 1890 — following the

³⁵ *Deutschlands Städtebau. Breslau*, ed. Verkehrsamt der Stadt Breslau, edited by G. Hallama, Breslau 1921, pp. 93 and following.

³⁶ See also: W. Molik, *Uniwersytet Wrocławski na tle uniwersytetów w Rzeszy (1871-1914) (Studia i materiały z dziejów Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego*, T. Kulak i W. Wrzesiński, eds., vol. III, Wrocław 1994, pp. 7-22).



TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?

legalization of the Social Party by the German government — the daily *Volkswacht für Schlesien* appeared in Wrocław. To publish stock market news, the three main dailies came out three times a day: the conservative *Schlesische Zeitung*, which reached 20,000 copies in 1912, the centre *Schlesische Volkszeitung* and the liberal *Breslauer Zeitung*.

After new Industrial Act was issued in 1869, setting up a theatre became easier, so apart from the City Theatre (1841), the Theodor Lobe's 'Vaudevilletheater' was established, and in the following year — 'Thalia'. In 1906, the city funded an opera building (today the Teatr Polski). Additionally, there was the Concert House with an auditorium for 1700 people, and other places of entertainment such as the Busch Circus and the Funfair. Interesting musicals were played by numerous garden theatres, and in the years preceding the War, cinemas appeared. Numerous restaurants, cafés, wine taverns, including those located in hotels or parks, were additional elements of the city atmosphere. Various sports organisations took care of the city social life, e.g. bowling centres were made available for poorer citizens, whereas the elite enjoyed horse races. Equally popular among the citizens were organizations for gymnastics (from 1858), rowing (1878), swimming (1881) and cycling (1893)³⁷.

The concentration of administrative institutions and political parties, local government bodies, universities, as well as academic and cultural organisations, in addition to the high potential of human resources and the advantageous changes in Wrocław's layout and landscape, transformed it into a metropolis, however on the scale of East Germany. With the economic growth of Wrocław and Silesia, the downsides of the city's geographical location became evident. Communications with other German provinces were impaired by the lack of direct railway connections and unfavourable tariffs, which prevented Wrocław from exporting goods to the Reich and forced producers to seek alternative markets in Southern and Eastern Europe. Futile efforts to lower the transport costs started in the 1890s and were continued throughout the interwar period³⁸. Also, all investments financed by the state authorities of Prussia and the Reich, including those related to irrigation and river regulation, prioritised other industrial centres and the cities of Rhineland, while neglecting Wrocław and Silesia. Interestingly, already in that period, the argument was often raised that the city required special attention due to its role as 'the upholder of German culture' in the east of Germany; later, it was much emphasised in the interwar period³⁹.

In 1918 — following the fall of the Hohenzollerns — Wrocław lost its status of King's residential city. Although it remained an east-German metropolis, its pre-war prosperity was over. Wrocław's prestige as the administrative centre suffered greatly, as in 1923 the city became merely the capital of the Lower Silesia province, fourth largest (26,615.83 km²) in the Prussian state. City officials — much like the general public in Germany — blamed the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles for the resulting economic and political problems, and did not accept the new territorial arrangements.

Translated by Katarzyna Hussar

³⁷ The special role of entertainment in the city atmosphere is stressed by the authors of studies contained in the publication *Berlin. Blicke auf die deutsche Metropole*, G. Brun i J. Reulecke, eds., Essen 1989.

³⁸ See: J. Partsch, *Lage und Bedeutung Breslau (Breslau. Lage. Natur...*, p. 24); A. Lucadou, *Strukturwandel Schlesiens*, Berlin 1943, p. 94.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28; see: T. Kulak, *Propaganda dolnośląskich władz prowincjonalnych w latach 1922-1933*, Wrocław 1981, p. 53 and following.



NARODOWY PROGRAM
ROZWOJU HUMANISTYKI

TERESA KULAK: A metropolis or merely a capital of a Prussian-german province?