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## BRZEŻNO – FORGOTTEN WATERING PLACE OF TRÓJMIASTO

### BRZEŻNO – ZAPOMNIANE KĄPIELISKO TRÓJMIASTA

#### Abstract

For more than 150 years, Brzeżno was a popular and frequented seaside resort with characteristic development, characteristic of what? You need to specify this or use a different adjective extensive, well cared-for park and a grand pier, yet the place was able to retain an intimate climate. The history of the resort started around the middle of the 19th century, when spa objects and facilities were built next to the medieval fishing hamlet. The place, which later became a seaside district of Gdańsk, had its heyday in the first half of the last century. In the post-war years, Brzeżno fell into decline, lost its historic development, former infrastructure, character and significance; although it was not completely forgotten, it played the role of a residential district. The beginning of the present century brings the commencement of the revitalization process of the partly preserved fragments of the former spa, which may signify a new era in the development of the former spa resort. Brzeżno's asset is still its location at the seaside, traces of its historic identity and close connections with Gdańsk. Using the potential of the place and restoring it to its former function will be possible if the actions undertaken at present are not limited to the fragmentary revitalization of some elements of the complex, but also provide for the introduction of a diverse functional programme and harmonious spatial growth, including reconstruction of the atmosphere of the old Brzeżno.

*Keywords: seaside resurt, historic identity, revitalization, potential of the place*

#### Streszczenie

Przez ponad półtora wieku Brzeżno było znanym i uczęszczanym kąpieliskiem nadmorskim, z charakterystyczną zabudową, rozległym, wypielęgnowanym parkiem i okazałym moło, zachowujące przy tym kameralny klimat miejsca. Historia kurortu zaczyna się około połowy XIX wieku, gdy obok średniowiecznej osady rybackiej powstały obiekty i urządzenia zdrojowe. Okres największej świetności i popularności tej miejscowości, a następnie osiedla – nadmorskiej dzielnicy Gdańska, przypada na I połowę ubiegłego stulecia. W latach powojennych Brzeżno podupada, traci historyczną zabudowę, dawną infrastrukturę, charakter i znaczenie; chociaż nie zostaje w całości zapomniane, pełni głównie rolę dzielnicy mieszkalnej. Z początkiem wieku rozpoczyna się proces rewitalizacji zachowanych częściowo fragmentów byłego źródła, co może oznaczać nowy etap w rozwoju byłego kurortu. Atutem Brzeżna jest wciąż jego położenie nad brzegiem morza, ślady historycznej tożsamości i bliskie związki z Gdańskiem. Wykorzystanie potencjału miejsca i powrót do jego dawnej roli będą możliwe, jeśli podejmowane obecnie działania nie ograniczą się do cząstkowej rewitalizacji elementów tego zespołu, ale obejmą także wprowadzenie zróżnicowanej oferty programowej i zadbanie o harmonijny rozwój przestrzenny, w tym odtworzenie nastroju dawnego Brzeżna.

*Słowa kluczowe: kąpielisko nadmorskie, tożsamość historyczna, rewitalizacja, potencjał miejsca*

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## 1. Introduction

The title of the article is by intention, a little deceptive. Brzeźno is not at present one of the popular seaside resorts or fashionable holiday destinations on the Polish coast of the Baltic Sea, yet it has not been completely forgotten.

The Brzeźno beach is frequented by local residents. Visitors who come to Gdańsk on various errands find a bed for the night in one of a few small hotels away from the noisy and crowded parts of the city. Cyclists and strollers use the trail, marked out along the Trójmiasto coastline, which starts here. Nevertheless, the old Brzeźno is no longer present. Looking at the remnants of the original fishing hamlet, partly mixed with the chaotic development from the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the last century, as well as when looking at the condition of the former park complex, one feels sorry and melancholic for what has been lost. Brzeźno, the way it was only several decades ago, and especially in the earlier periods, has a circle of devotees and is still cherished in the fond memory of those who knew it. Are the glory days of this resort gone forever?

## 2. The emergence and development of the seaside resort

The former bathing spa and holiday resort, later a district of Gdańsk, which it has remained until today, may be included in the category of spa centres linked to a big city<sup>1</sup>.

The development of Brzeźno as a village, a watering place and a city district may be divided into several stages:

- a fishing hamlet,
- emergence and development of seaside watering place,
- construction of facilities connected with the Gdańsk port in the vicinity of Brzeźno,
- development and heyday of the seaside resort,
- military operations,
- functioning of the watering place in the socialist economic reality,
- expansion of Brzeźno as a residential district of Gdańsk,
- decline of the watering place,
- commencement of the resort revitalization.

Brzeźno became a popular watering place on the Gdańsk Coast in the 1<sup>st</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Spa facilities and objects started to emerge in the area of the medieval fishing village originally belonging to the order of Cistercians of Oliwa<sup>2</sup>. Before the end of the century, the original spa complex comprised:

- a bathhouse,
- the Spa Hall with the curative garden,
- the Seafront Pavilion<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> According to the classification suggested by Elżbieta Węclawowicz-Bilska. See: *Uzdrowiska polskie. Zagadnienia programowo-przestrzenne*, The CUT Press 2008, 159-160.

<sup>2</sup> In the last quarter of the 18th century (until 1807), Brzeźno was a part of the so-called Oliwa estate remaining under Prussian management. See: [http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brzeźno\\_\(Gdańsk\)](http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brzeźno_(Gdańsk)).

<sup>3</sup> The first bathhouse was built here in 1820, the second one, after the first was destroyed by fire, in 1833. The Spa Hall was built in Brzeźno at the same time. New facilities were built towards the end

The composition was completed with the organized park complex on the wooded areas stretching parallel to the beach.

Starting from the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the eastern part of Brzeźno acquired a defensive function<sup>4</sup>. Some fortifications, artillery stands and a railway station were constructed on the outskirts of the town. A part of the seafront fortifications, rebuilt in the first decades of the last century, has survived until contemporary times. The military structures (shelters and artillery stands) were incorporated into the park area after the 1<sup>st</sup> world war.

The glory days of Brzeźno as an independent town and subsequently (after it had been incorporated within the administrative boundaries of Gdańsk) as a spa district, were connected with the emergence of new objects and facilities, which enriched the recreational appeal of the seaside resort. The place experienced its heyday at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and later in the interwar years. Apart from the objects and areas mentioned above, the watering place infrastructure comprised the following:

- a 100-metre pier, subsequently extended to 200 hundred metres<sup>5</sup>,
- a bathhouse with over three hundred cabins for ladies, gentlemen and families<sup>6</sup>.

The seafront Spa Park, originally called the Brzeźno Woods and planted for the protection of military warehouses, was an important part of the spa area. After being transformed in 1842 to comply with the canons of the art of horticulture, it became a carefully planned park complex with compositional axes and a vantage point, adorned with varied vegetation. As such, it started to perform the function of a recreational place, a venue for concerts and a meeting spot. Hotels, restaurants and guesthouses provided comfortable sojourn conditions for visitors coming in great numbers<sup>7</sup>. Brzeźno enjoyed the excellent reputation of a well-known, fashionable and attractive spa resort, and it had its ardent admirers<sup>8</sup>.

Brzeźno had transportation links to Nowy Port and Gdańsk in the form of vehicle roads, railway lines and subsequently, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, tramway lines.

Incorporation of the place into the administrative boundaries of Gdańsk in 1914, involved creating closer links with the city.

Three functional areas could be identified within the layout of Brzeźno: a fishing hamlet from the west, a watering place with the park in its central part and the post-fort and port development from the east. The plan of the town from 1932 shows: the historic spa with the Spa Hall; the Seafront Pavilion; the Pier; the Bathhouse; the park. It also shows the remaining areas – the fishing and the port development complexes. The watering place area is held

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of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: a new Spa Hall and the picturesque Seafront Pavilion, situated right next to the beach.

<sup>4</sup> I am referring here to the construction of Fort Brzeźno at the beginning of the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>5</sup> The 100-metre pier was built in 1900, and extended to 200 hundred in the interwar period.

<sup>6</sup> Originally built before the 1<sup>st</sup> world war, pulled down and built again in the years 1919/20, and subsequently modernized.

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting here that, as emphasized by Maria Bogucka, in the interwar period, going to fashionable places with a favourable climate and location in order to improve one's health and spend leisure time in an interesting way became not only popular, but also available even for people of average income. See: Bogucka M., *Kultura, naród, trwanie. Dzieje kultury polskiej od zarania do 1980 roku*, Warszawa 2008, 400.

<sup>8</sup> One of them is Gunter Grass, who mentions Brzeźno in his books.

together by the alleys leading through the park towards the sea – from the east, the view towards the entry into the port is closed by a breakwater with a lighthouse<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. The decline of the resort

The break in the functioning of the watering place which took place during the 1<sup>st</sup> world war did not stop it from returning to the previous condition and expanding the spa function. The situation in the district was different after 1945. The second world war and the change of political regime brought about the destruction of the former spa character and infrastructure. As a result of war operations, the major part of the historic spa development (including the Seafront Pavilion, the bathhouse and the pier) had been annihilated. The Spa Hall was partitioned and turned into council flats. The almost sole remnants of the old resort were the declining Spa Park, the complex of seafront beach development and the main alley, a sandy promenade leading from the Spa Hall along the park to the pavilions of the ‘paid beach’. Together, they created a romantic enclave – a reminder of the former glory.

In the post-war decades (from the 50s to the 70s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), single and multi-family development (including great-slab blocks of flats) emerged in the vicinity of the fishermen’s houses and the former spa, bringing chaos into the orderly spatial layout of the district.

The method of management applied to the space and the historic objects in the system of the so-called socialist economy, gradually led to the degradation of what had remained of the former complex<sup>10</sup>, and in consequence, to the decline of the spa function in Brzeźno. Tourist infrastructure deficiencies and low quality of the offered services, dilapidated beach and contaminated coastal waters completed the degradation and disrepair.

### 4. Beginnings of Brzeźno revitalization

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century brings a breakthrough in the modern history of the once-exquisite spa and a chance of regaining the lost function of the seaside district of Gdańsk. Initial projects and works on lifting Brzeźno from its state of dilapidation have been broken down into stages planned for the subsequent years of the first decade *not sure which years you mean, needs rewording* of the present century.

<sup>9</sup> Two lighthouses existed in the eastern part of Brzeźno as early as in the mid-18th century, serving the purpose of navigation at the entrance into the port of Gdańsk, one of them was replaced nearly a hundred years later.

<sup>10</sup> Gradual degradation resulting from lack of proper care of the preserved development coupled with operations of stormy weather and, as is supposed in Brzeźno, arson at the end of the last century, all together led to the destruction of the seafront wooden development complex, which originally housed a restaurant, changing rooms, beach equipment rental and a natural open-air solarium (I quote the information on probable arson on the grounds of conversations with Brzeźno residents).

The Brzeźno Park and its environs have been included in the revitalization programme. The park alleys as well as its facilities and furniture have been cleaned up and rearranged, including the orchestra gazebo and the entrance gate opening onto the promenade running along the park and into the beach as well as the viewing platform at the location of the destroyed beach development complex. The centre of the district has been paved and a green plaza has been created at the entrance to the former spa zone.

The provisional services development existing in the same area has remained mostly unchanged. The actual way of use of the former Spa Hall is not congruent to its original character. The adjacent area, belonging to the spa garden, remains still in a condition of complete ruin and devastation<sup>11</sup>. The park itself is still covered with wild and overgrown vegetation, which gives it the character of a forest park.

The western, fishing and holiday part of the present district of Gdańsk, with its former fishermen and later – villa and single-family development, has been completed by three small hotels near the beach, built in the last decade, and a seafront walking and cycling trail, running along the coast and linking Brzeźno with Sopot. In season there are small cafés and bars put up along the walking trail, which bring some life into the sleepy atmosphere of the district. A new pier has been built beyond the area of the former watering place, to the west.

The present condition of the seaside part of the district may be described as extremely varied functionally, aesthetically and spatially.

## 5. Final conclusions

The primary asset of Brzeźno is its seaside location, making use of natural environment elements and the proximity of a big urban complex. The specific cultural environment of the former watering place, comprising the composed park complex, the characteristic architectural objects of the historic spa and the promenade linking the important places with the seaside beach, created the appeal of this place for over 150 years<sup>12</sup>. Small-scale characteristic fishing village development, neighbouring the spa zone, was a romantic completion of this complex. It could be said that the assets of location, development and general climate surpassed the ones of Sopot. Restoring its former role to Brzeźno would require not only repairing the damage, but also building the watering facilities from scratch. One of the basic conditions that would have to be fulfilled is also the problem of Gdańsk Bay coastal waters purification. Apart from the efforts to regain the lost assets of the former spa district, it would be necessary to enrich the offer and the recreation and tourism infrastructure and adjusting it to modern standards.

Undertaking the task of complete revitalization of the park complex and making the former watering facilities more functionally attractive may breathe new life into this still partly dilapidated and forgotten place on the map of contemporary Gdańsk, once one of the pearls of the Gdańsk coast.

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<sup>11</sup> The desolate area of the former garden has been fenced up with corrugated steel sheets.

<sup>12</sup> As emphasized by Mieczysław Orłowicz, the author of pre-war tourist guidebooks. See: *Brzeźno w granicach Gdańska, czyli kąpielisko od 1914 roku*, [www.przewodnik.trojmiasto.pl](http://www.przewodnik.trojmiasto.pl).

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