

THE ŁÓDŹ ATLAS

Sheet VI: Łódź in the interwar Period and During the Nazi Occupation

Jacek Wesolowski

Łódź in 1910

Łódź’s spatial layout in the two interwar decades still cannot be considered in isolation from the surrounding areas, even though the radical change of the city’s boundaries in 1915 entailed incorporation of the majority of urbanised areas north and south of the city. Still exurban was the rapidly growing Ruda Pabianicka which gained urban status in 1924, as well as sizeable built-up areas in Chojny, Zarzew, Złotno and Radogoszcz. Already in the early 1920s urbanisation progressed in the vast areas of Marysin lying off the city’s northern boundary.

The interwar period brought to Łódź industrial stagnation and the need to restructure the economy. Despite the difficult situation and the Great Depression of the early 1930s, the city experienced a significant population increase and massive territorial expansion, predominantly due to single-family housing developments. Already in the early 1920s a broad grassroots literacy programme was launched and financed out of the public funds. In the effort to combat illiteracy and implement compulsory education a number of elementary schools were housed in new impressive buildings; and new hospitals, clinics and public baths were erected for the purpose of extending medical care and hygiene. A major civilisational breakthrough took place with the construction of sewage and water supply systems (the latter were completed and put into service already during WW2) which, however did not reach the suburbs; their concept design by Lindley dated from the times of the Russian partition. At the same time, the gas and electricity networks were steadily extended, also into the suburbs.

Much more modest was the council housing programme undertaken by the city, housing cooperatives, diocesan authorities, and later by the Towarzystwo Osiedli Robotniczych (Workers’ Estates Association). Due to the limited scale of these investment projects, the main beneficiaries of these programmes were the middle class groups, mainly public service officials. For the broader working class an attractive option at the time was a humble single-family house in one of the newly developed suburbs. Some of them, like Radogoszcz and Marysin, featured a very interesting geometric arrangement, which unfortunately highlighted the contrast between the ambitious urban plan and the poor quality of architecture and street infrastructure. At the other end, Radiostacja, an estate boasting high social esteem, was built to a schematic pattern that originated from the pre-war times.

In this context, special attention is well-deserved by some estates that were built to a single urban plan and architectural design. Three multi-family council housing estates were constructed, of which the J. Montwiłł-Mirecki estate in Polesie Konstantynowskie represents a particularly valuable (though unfinished) piece inspired by the avant-garde trends of functional architecture. The estate became an important element of spatial transformations in the western outskirts of the city, whose core was the ambitious project of the Park Ludowy (People’s Park), the larger part of which was located in the city forest. The project also envisaged a limited sports and recreation programme linked to the facilities of Łódź Sports Club (ŁKS). Generally, the interwar period witnessed mass grassroots, though not infrequently sponsored by large factories, activities of sports associations, the spatial effect of which was a range of minor and poorly-equipped sports facilities.

The tramway network, despite its continuous modernisation and expansion (city buses appeared only during WW2), was lagging behind the rapidly expanding city, and anyway everyday tram travels were still beyond the means of most workers. However the existence of tramlines, in particular outside the city limits, determined the attractiveness of particular locations and caused more intensive urbanisation of Ruda Pabianicka, Radogoszcz, and Zdrowie.

For the city, the winding-up of some factories meant that new land was released for non-industrial developments and some magnificent buildings were available for public purposes (for instance the Regional Council was located in Poznański’s Palace). A particular role in the spatial layout of Łódź was played by the collapse of the Heinzels’ empire, in result of which the former factory compound in Brzeźna Street was replaced by luxurious apartment buildings (they were also built at the back of the Heinzels’ city factory in the newly delimited Świętokrzyska Street). The Heinzels’ large Julianów estate in Radogoszcz was parcelled out for single-family housing developments, and its appurtenant spacious park was taken over by the city.

The spatial changes in the city centre were not many. Apart from delimiting Świętokrzyska Street, works were continued to extend Spacerowa Street (later named Kościuszki Avenue) to the south, while its northern sections were enriched with appropriate modern architectural content. The most important spatial change occurred when in the early 1930s the railway tracks of Łódź Fabryczna railway station were removed off Kilińskiego Street (formerly Widzewska Street) which was so freed from the narrow flyover and the area so reclaimed could be developed with new buildings. The city landscape continued to gain public buildings that had been is short supply, although the number of projects was greater than the implementation capacity (for example, a sumptuous town hall projected in Plac Wolności -- formerly Nowy Rynek - was never built). Apart from the buildings of military, financial, and judicial institutions, at the end of the 1930s some cultural facilities were built, too, including today’s Łódź Culture Club (ŁDK). These undertakings were not always spot-on, e.g. the location of the YMCA building in the valuable garden of Meyer’s Passage.

The 1939–1945 period of the German occupation was a major dividing line in the modern history of Łódź. The city was incorporated into the Third Reich, received a new name (Litzmannstadt) and coat of arms, and the public space was entirely Germanised (new street names hardly referenced to the local tradition). The city landscape lost the synagogues that were demolished in the early stages of the occupation.

The period of World War II cannot be separated from the policy of racist terror and crimes committed by the Nazis. The ghetto area, inaccessible from the outside and surrounded with barbed wire, occupied only a part of the former Jewish district, which in combination with forced resettlements of thousands of non-residents made the living conditions unbearable. The Łódź ghetto, an area of poor construction standard, with no water supply or sewage system and with starvation-level food rations became a great work camp that was ruthlessly exploited by the occupant until the transportation of its inhabitants to concentration camps in 1942–1944. The non-Jewish majority was subjected to a nationality verification which resulted in the population being officially divided into ‘superior’, considered to be German, and ‘inferior’ – Polish; the latter were denied basic human rights and subjected to persecutions, even harsher than in the General Gouvernement (e.g. no access to cultural facilities, public parks, the closing of several churches, etc.). The initial period of the German occupation was marked by mass resettlements of Polish people to poorer districts and housing buildings, and even to the General Gouvernement. The Radogoszcz police prison (the place of mass murder of prisoners on the eve of the Soviet Army’s arrival) and Gestapo headquarters located in the pre-war Jewish high school building in Anstadta Street became notorious as spooky dun-

geons. A shameful page in the history of wartime hatred was the concentration camp for children and youth in Przemysłowa Street. It is hardly surprising then that after the retreat of the occupying forces in January 1945 the blade of hatred turned against the German community (whose members were detained in the former German work camp in Sikawa).

Concurrently, as part of the euphemistically called ‘German reconstruction effort’, the occupying authorities began to plan how to modernise and transform the city. The actual activities, however, were more than modest. First of all, the city’s area was largely expanded so that it essentially coincided with that which would be in place for more than the subsequent 40 years of the Polish People’s Republic. Several minor improvements to the tram system were made, and urban and suburban tram operators were finally allowed to enter the competitor’s service routes. Also, at the time of the German occupation trams were transformed into the real means of mass transport. Additionally, the electrical grid was significantly extended, and the city’ waterworks were completed and launched.

As part of the city reconstruction programme it was planned to create a new monumental centre between the Central Railway Station (Łódź Kaliska) and Piotrkowska Street, as well as large “German” districts on the other side of the Kaliska Railroad off the pre-war Kałna Street. These plans were never accomplished, however preliminary works were undertaken to make over the central city quarter by thinning out its development and giving it a more German appearance. The old town buildings in the Łódka River valley were largely demolished – for the immediate need to separate the ghetto, and for the target purpose of enriching the city’s structure and establishing green areas. To satisfy the needs of the newly arriving police and public service personnel a few new housing estates were built, as well as one for German re-settlers (the latter, finally intended for Polish residents, was of a very rudimentary standard). Mainly for the purpose of servicing the eastern front, the railway node in Łódź was significantly developed.

Commentary on the maps

Map 1. shows the city’s spatial layout within its 1916 boundaries on the eve of the outbreak of WW2. The symbols mark major buildings erected in the two interwar decades – therefore a fuller picture of the city’s spatial character can be obtained by comparing it with the maps in Sheet V. The notice ‘newly-developed streets’ applies to the streets delimited in the period more or less after 1910. The basic cartographic source was the city map published in the official guide to Łódź by Dylik.

Map 2. The first map presents a synthetic picture of the urban technical infrastructure, with special focus on the networks installed during the interwar period. In view of the investment process, the final date for the gas and sewerage systems is assumed to be 1939, and for the waterworks and electrical grid – 1945. The source material was the classic work by Ginsbert Łódź..., which has been verified in detail against the publications and information from the contemporary operators of these networks. The second map depicts the development of the electric tramway network from its introduction in 1898 until 1939. Only the opening dates of each line are shown, omitting any rearrangements or building the second track. The basic source were both monographs on the Łódź tramways by Żródlak et al. Both maps have been overlain on the built-up area as in 1939.

Map 3. presents the spatial and administrative relations within the city and its immediate environs as at the end of 1930s. The built-up area is shown dynamically in temporal cross-sections of the interwar period (due to the absence of sources concerning the southern part of the city, the intermediate cross-section was abandoned). Village boundaries are shown only for the areas involved in urban development. The basic sources for determining the urbanisation range were topographic maps: the German map (Karte des Westlischen Rußlands) and two editions of the Polish map developed by WIG. Village boundaries were drawn based on the map in Dylik’s guide.

Map 4. – a general view of the Montwiłł-Mirecki estate – based on the studies by Olenderek

Map 5. shows a synthetic picture of the city during the second part of the German occupation. The city boundaries and street names are based on the wartime maps of Łódź and an article by Jaskulski. The basic source for determining the location of individual administration and terror facilities was the work by Bolanowski. The ghetto’s topography has been determined with the use of the materials from the symposium Getto w Łodzi and the study edited by Adelson & Lapides. Elements of the spatial development are primarily based on the study by Bolanowski.

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