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## **Poznań in the early modernism time. A concept of a modern city postulated by Sylwester Pajzderski**

**Abstract:** This article presents a concept of a modern Poznań development in the early modernism era developed by Sylwester Pajzderski. Because the original publication describing spatial assumptions in 1929 no illustrations were placed, the author of this article attempted to somehow reconstruct selected design assumptions. A special attention was paid to depicting proposals of changes in town composition and structure in relation to the residential, industrial and green areas. The concept a modern town development postulated by Sylwester Pajzderski in the late 1920ies presented in this article was a reflection municipal needs at a specific point in time. It was not so revolutionary as subsequent Wł. Czarnecki's proposal in a general plan of Poznań in 1934. Nevertheless, it was characterised by substantial town planning knowledge and experience. We should bear in mind that from the point of view of an architect and town planner it is an interesting case documenting modern town planning thought Poland.

**Key words:** City of Poznań, modernism, modern city, urban planning

### **Spatial and historic conditions in considerations on a modern town**

In the case of Poznań, the 1920ies marked a stage of coming to terms with a recently ended World War I aftermath. The town itself was not damaged as a result of warfare. However, the town structure which Poznań inherited after Prussian rule seemed insufficient for its successful development. On the other hand, over 100-year occupation period was still on the lips and minds of Poznań dwellers. Anything associated with Prussian culture, customs, language or architecture had rather negative connotations. This assumption determined all actions taken by new municipal authorities focused on some kind of town re-Polonisation; and this was also the case in relation to town planning. Starting with such town tissue Polish architects, at the beginning Sylwester Pajzderski (1876–1953), followed by Władysław Czarnecki (1895–1983) in the 1920ies and 1930ies, attempted to cre-

ate an image of a modern town, subordinate to the idea of serving its inhabitants. At this stage of our considerations we should refer to causes and outcomes of a new town creation at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

When at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the municipal fortification system<sup>1</sup> was dismantled, contributing to town development<sup>2</sup> after the period of bondage, nobody realised how negative opinions these activities would trigger after 1918. Despite incorporation of new districts such as Wilda, Łazarz and Jeżyce, Sołacz and Winiary the town suffered from some kind of spatial dysfunction. German architects and town planners lead by Josef Stübben planned developing the town westwards, as it was at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1903 J. Stübben worked out a town development zone plan<sup>3</sup>, later modified in 1914. It was a foundation for the development of a modern Poznań. He proposed to intensify residential developments within Wilda, Łazarz and Jeżyce districts. Newly incorporated villages, turned to Poznań districts, were soon built up with new buildings primarily of residential character. Introduction of a construction class principle<sup>4</sup> was to ensure residential developments in the aforementioned area, taking into consideration a varied number of storeys, building height, roof inclination and building location within plots. This spatial structure formed a foundation for creation of town planning order which, with minor modifications, works until today. Shaping town planning network enabled to create compact quarters, which included single buildings located on building plots. The

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<sup>1</sup> After the Congress of Vienna (1815), Poznań was incorporated to an autonomous province called Grand Duchy of Poznań [Wielkie Księstwo Poznańskie] and became its capital. A nearby Russian border (60 km east of Poznań) encouraged Prussian authorities to turn the town into a stronghold. The first plan was presented in 1817. Fortification works lasted from 1828 and lasted till 1864. Later, until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the whole system was being consistently modernised and updated. However, such activities were always lagging behind the fast advancing military technology (Nadolny 2009. p. 116).

<sup>2</sup> Mass exodus of German population from Poznań at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century made municipal authorities address Emperor William II with petition aimed at dismantling stronghold's ramparts which would encourage free town development. The first proposal of this kind was sent by Poznań local authorities to Berlin on 15 January 1898. In a letter signed by Mayor Richard Wittig, it was postulated that the town within its ramparts has got no free areas suitable for residential development. The reply came in March 1898; the Emperor granted his preliminary consent for such activities. The fortified area covered 122 ha. However, the final consent was not issued until 1902. After that, the town engulfed several villages located at its outskirts. The process of unification of these urban and rural areas commenced aimed at creation of cohesive municipal unit (Nadolny 2009. p. 116).

<sup>3</sup> In the zone plan, classes of built-up quarters were singled out and determined by regulation lines. They differed as to their built-up plot areas, number of storeys and the kind of buildings. This plan enabled to introduce varied developments, such as compact housing, compact housing with front gardens and detached houses. All the relevant information was also included in a graphic plan (Nadolny 2010. p. 9).

<sup>4</sup> Classes I, Ia, IIa, Ib, IIb, IIIb i IVb included compact development adjacent to street frontage. For Wilda, Łazarz and Jeżyce districts IIa, IIb and IIIb construction classes were proposed. A detailed division of construction classes consisted in varied number of storeys, building height, roof inclination, minimum area and width of yards, percentage of built-up area in relation to the percentage of built-up area in relation to the plot area as well as distances between elements. The number of storeys and percentage of built-up area were gradually decreasing from class I to IV, i.e. from the town centre to its outskirts (Nadolny 2010. p. 10).

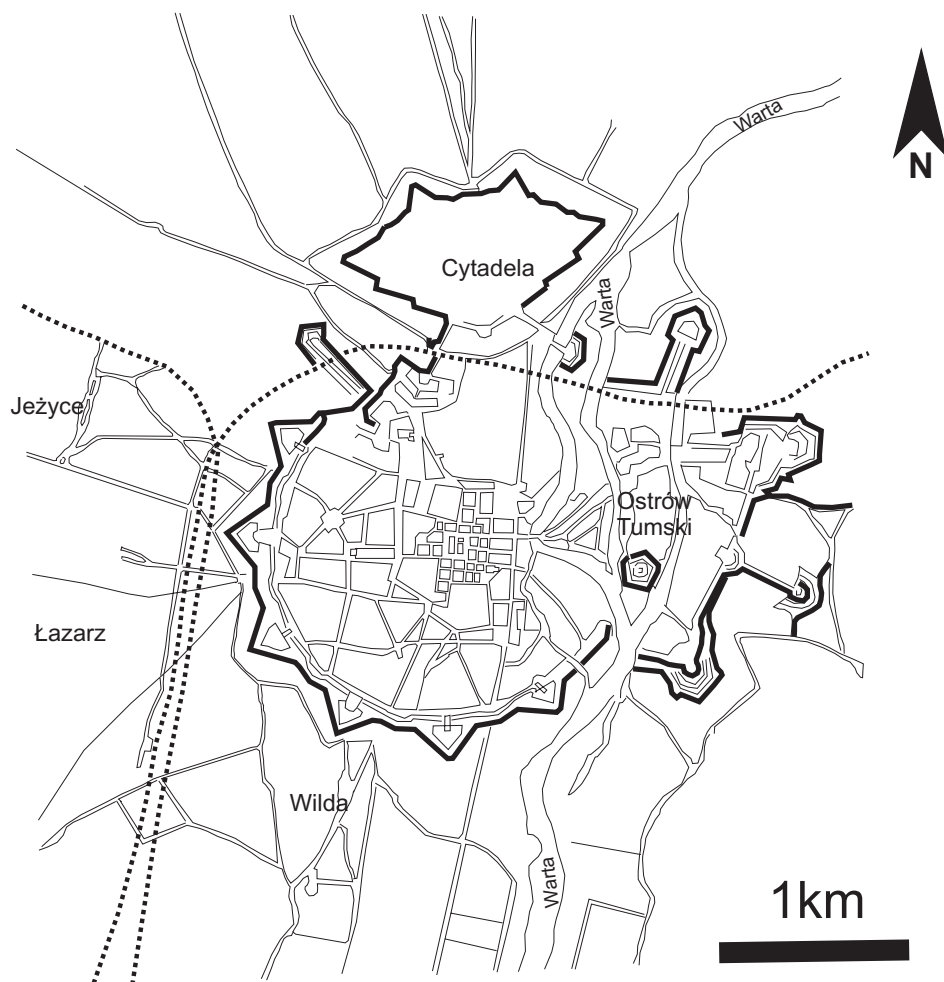


Fig. 1. First line fortification system of the Poznań stronghold at the end of the 19th century (author's elaboration)

ultimate composition of each quarter resulted from construction of residential buildings in line with complementation principle.

When Poland regained its independence in 1918, Poznań entered a new stage of spatial development. Activities were taken aimed at further unification of the town into a single unit. New districts created at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were being completed with new developments and planned town growth were more sustainable. In 1925 new settlements were incorporated at the eastern part of the town: Rataje, Starołęka Mała and Komandoria, northern Winiary and Naranowice as well as southern Dębiec<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> Following incorporation of new municipalities into the town, its area reached some 3,238.2 ha with population density of 32.6 inhabitants per 1.0 ha of the town planning structure (Pajzderski 1929, p. 507).

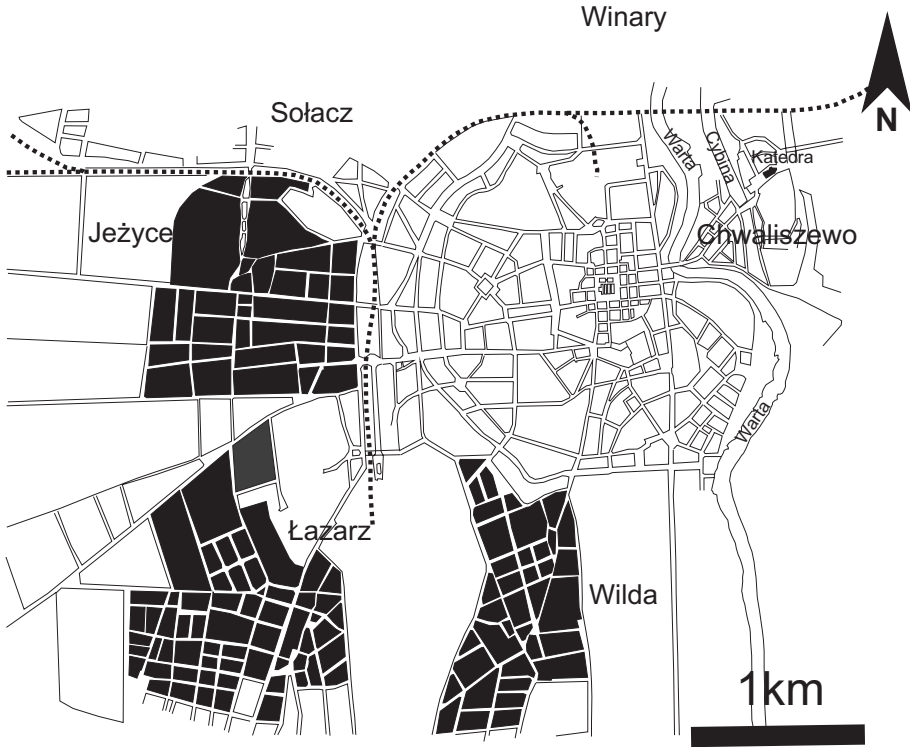


Fig. 2. Location of Wilda, Jeżyce and Łazarz districts within the map of Poznań at the beginning of the 20th century (author's elaboration)

## Poznań in an early modernism time

In the case of Poznań, the beginning of 1920ies is marked by town planning activities carried out Sylwester Pajzderski. As one of few architects in the town experienced in town planning designing (Kodym-Kozaczko 2009, p. 40) he became some kind of a pioneer of a new concept of modern Poznań development, which was later continued by Władysław Czarnecki in another scope and formula.

In a chapter of *Poznań Chronicle* issued on the occasion of the Polish National Exhibition in Poznań in 1929 (Pajzderski 1929, p. 507) he presented an original vision of town planning guidelines. It was substantially different from the J. Stübber's town vision dated back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which S. Pajzderski criticised in the following way, 'The development during the pre-war era was chaotic, without any limits regulating creation of factories in residential areas of western and southern Poznań, neglecting eastern town districts, such as Chwaliszewo, Śródka and Miasteczko. Some plots in the town centre where foundation construction was found to be difficult were not built-up at all. Now, within the last 2 years new municipal buildings have been or are being constructed (Pajzderski 1929, p. 507).

## Residential development in Poznań according to S. Pajzderski's concept

As far as residential development is concerned, S. Pajzderski in his dissertation postulated creation of new residential units he referred to as open development. Their location was planned at the southern and western parts of Jeżyce and Św. Łazarz districts (presently Łazarz district). According to the author's intention such a solution was introduced to loosen the relatively compact development of the aforementioned districts. Undoubtedly, such an action could have arisen from the growing demand for detached houses; on the other hand, it was definitely an aftermath of a town-garden idea postulated by Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928) (B. Świt-Jankowska 2010, p. 236).

The proposal of construction ordinance for the town of Poznań, worked out at the Development Department in 1926, envisaged decreasing the building compactness in the town due to health reasons. This concept was to separate areas defined as residential from industrial ones. We may assume that the proposed provisions aimed at some kind of retreat from German concepts and visions concerning development shaping in Poznań. In the aforementioned document S. Pajzderski (1929, p. 507–511) repeatedly regretted having mixed residential and industrial functions within a framework of a single quarter, let alone respective districts.

Poznań town architects' views on residential issues in the proposed construction ordinance overlapped with provisions proposed in official documents, above all in Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 16 February 1928 concerning construction law and housing estates development<sup>6</sup>. This document, art. 16 comprised recommendations regarding town zoning accompanied with provisions referring to the question of percentage investment in the spatial town structure. 'The development density should be standardised according to planned function of new or the character of existing districts (commercial, industrial and residential ones). For respective zones and districts, streets or roads, the following should be defined: a) building distance from streets, borders and other buildings, b) height of buildings, c) dimensions of un-built-up areas within building plots'<sup>7</sup>.

Within the framework of a centric town development concept advocated by Pajzderski, town planning activities were proposed in the eastern, southern and western parts of the town. They envisaged creation of housing estate units, with the aim to complement town spatial structure. In order to meet the assumptions of the plan, residential estate in Dębiecka street, composed of 213 building plots was to be created in the southern part of the town. Another one in the eastern part of town, along Warszawska street, consisting of 242 building plots and in the western part, in Szamarzewskiego street, one more comprising 300 plots. The last housing estate was to be reserved for the tramway enterprise employees.

<sup>6</sup> Journal of Laws No 23, item. 202 of 1928.

<sup>7</sup> Op.cit., p. 23.

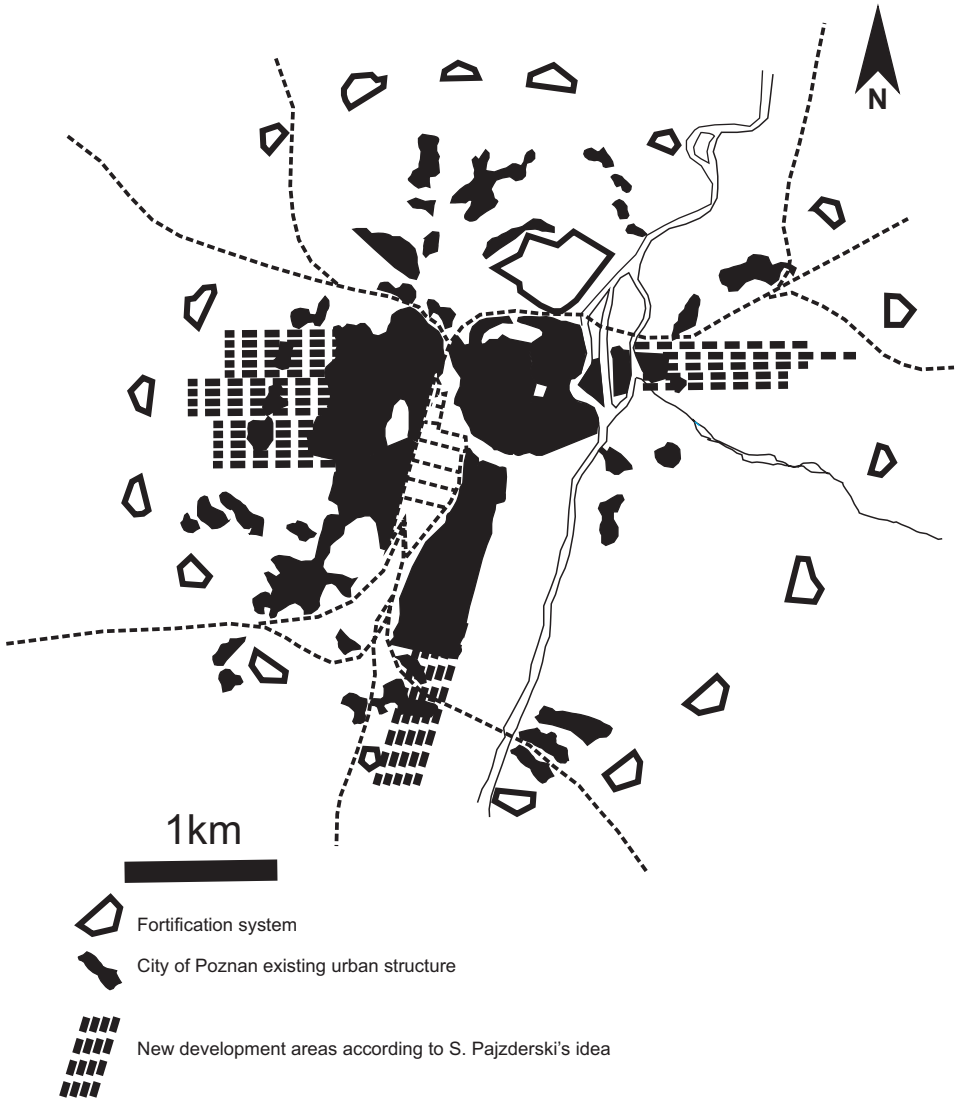


Fig. 3. Concept of residential development shaping in Poznań according to S. Pajzderski, based on a description placed in Poznań Chronicle (author's elaboration)

The spatial concept of housing estates planning was based on creation of simple town planning assumptions, building plots situated at an angle, monotonous layout of repeated quarters of detached houses. Another case is plan of Warszawskie housing estate developed by Sylwester Pajzderski himself. As a result of undertaken actions, at the end of 1920ies, along Warsaw road, in or about 1927, a new spatial villa development – Warszawskie housing estate – was erected. It was an attempt to entourage Poznań dwellers reside in the eastern part of the town. The

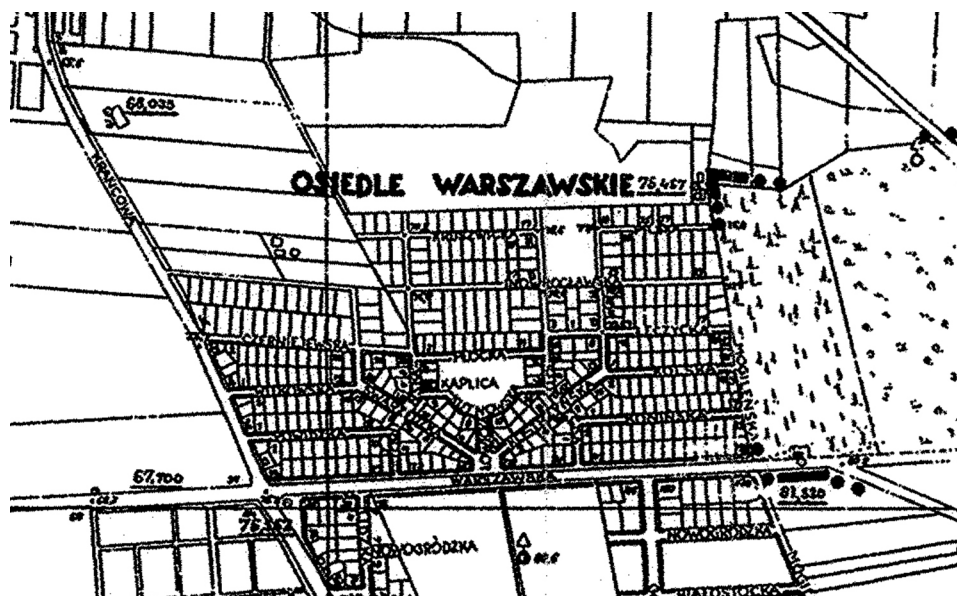


Fig. 4. Fragment of Poznań town map of 1933 after delimitation of Warszawskie housing estate (author's collection)

concept consisted in creation of symmetrical town-planning system. The central element of the composition was a square located near Warszawska street; from this place streets were running in all directions, like sun rays (Grzeszczuk-Brendel 2010, p. 271). They in turn were connected with peripheral streets parallel to the line delimitating Warszawska street.

## Industry location concept

A modern town according to Pajzderski's concept was to possess a clearly defined division into functional zones and clear borders separating industrial and residential areas. In this case industrial developments which after Poland's partitions by neighbouring powers were located in various parts of the town, now they were to be primarily located in northern and eastern parts. Selected areas were marked in the northern part of the town situated around Garbarska dam and the Poznań-Zbąszyń railway track. The eastern part of the town was to have an industrial area situated west of Poznań-Starołęka road. The areas of Miasteczko, Śródka and Chwaliszewo were to be excluded from the industrial zone. Location of industrial developments in this particular part of the town was determined, according to Pajzderski's concept, by utilitarian reasons, above all, by good waterways and railroad connections. Zoning industrial districts in these parts of the town was also justified by geographic conditions. An important factor 'which the architect took into account was the southern and north-western winds blowing in the town,. As he himself mentioned in his description to the plan, he intended

to avoid ‘town contamination’ (Pajzderski 1929, p. 508) by smoke and fumes generated by industrial plants. This type of thinking may be described today as very ecological, especially if we take into consideration the state of environmental studies and comfort of living in the town in those days.

## Green areas concept

When in 1925 Le Corbusier presented his Plan Voisin, he also referred to green areas within the framework of town structure. Green areas played an important role in the plan, constituting some kind of catalyst between communication, public spaces and residential buildings. They were to constitute an element of the network’s ‘heart’ with a strong connection to existing green areas in the town outskirts.

According to S. Pazjderski’s<sup>8</sup> concept, the Warta river, as it was in later designs elaborated by W. Czarnecki<sup>9</sup>, was supposed to be the main ‘town air purifier’ (Pajzderski 1929, p. 508). Leisure areas were designed along its southern banks as well as a stadium<sup>10</sup>, playgrounds and sports facilities. Elements completing the structures were to be allotment gardens and municipal parks, connected with municipal woods in Dębina near Starołęka.

Adequately to the southern green belt, Pajzderski envisaged to create a northern belt which was supposed to begin at the Citadel (the northern slopes of the Citadel were to become places for sports exercises) and run towards Naramowice. The third arm of the green system was to be a band comprising Marii Magdaleny cemetery, Sołacki Park, projected tree garden, green areas in Gołęcin. The green structure created in such a way was to extend towards forests near Kiekrz. The green areas system was to be complete with cemeteries located on slopes of the former fortress ramparts used as public Parks.

## Summary

To complement the topics of residential, green and industrial areas in accordance with Pajzderski’s concept it was also necessary to present issues connected with creation of new communication networks as well as projects aimed at the Warta

<sup>8</sup> Prior to S. Pajzderski concept, the only parks and at the same time green areas within the town structure were; the regional garden, św. Krzyża cemetery in Półwiejska and św. Marii Magdaleny streets, Stübben’s ring.

<sup>9</sup> In a new general plan of Poznań of 1934 a new concept of municipal green area development was developed by Town architect Władysław Czarnecki; it was called a ring-and-wedge system was envisaged. This Project hinged on an internal Green Ring – created at the beginning of the 20th century within former Poznań stronghold ramparts. Apart from the green ring in the fortress belt, a new 1000–1300 m one was planned to be located on private farming land. The town authorities planned purchasing and forestation of 12 green wedges and belts. These wedges formed a cross, with a park character in the centre, then more forest-like until turning to a regular forest in the outskirts. The wedges divided Poznań structurally into districts, a planned system of promenades was to connect them with remaining municipal green areas.

<sup>10</sup> The Municipal Stadium was built in Dolna Wilda on the occasion of the Polish National Exhibition.



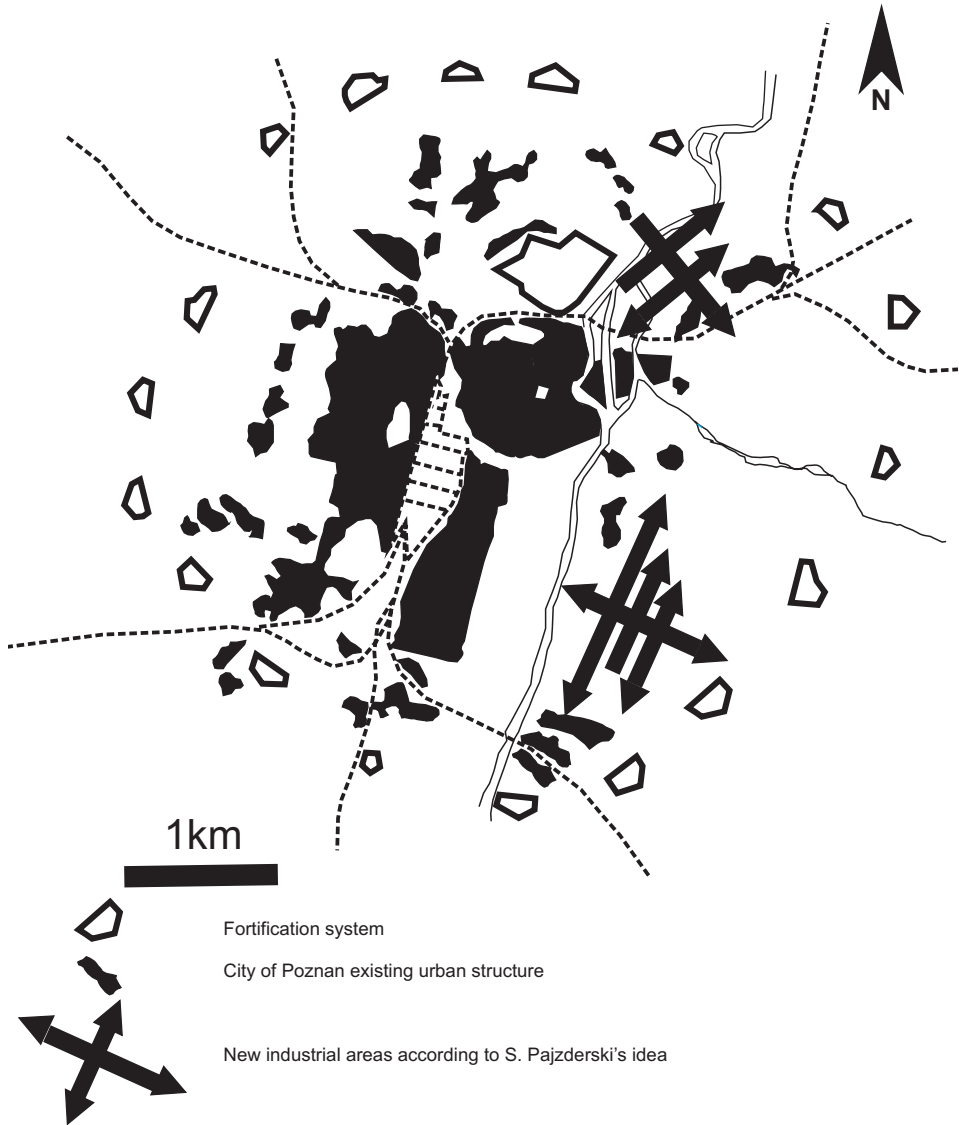


Fig. 5. Concept of industrial areas shaping in Poznań according to S. Pajzderski's idea, based on description placed in *Poznań Chronicle* (author's elaboration)

river regulation. The concept of a modern town development postulated by Sylwester Pajzderski in the late 1920ies was a reflection of municipal demands in a particular time. It was not so revolutionary as subsequent W. Czarnecki's proposal in a general plan of Poznań in 1934. Nevertheless, it was characterised by substantial town planning knowledge and experience. Taking into consideration the spatial conditions of the town, as well as legal framework, it was some kind of continuation of new town image creation which was developed at the beginning

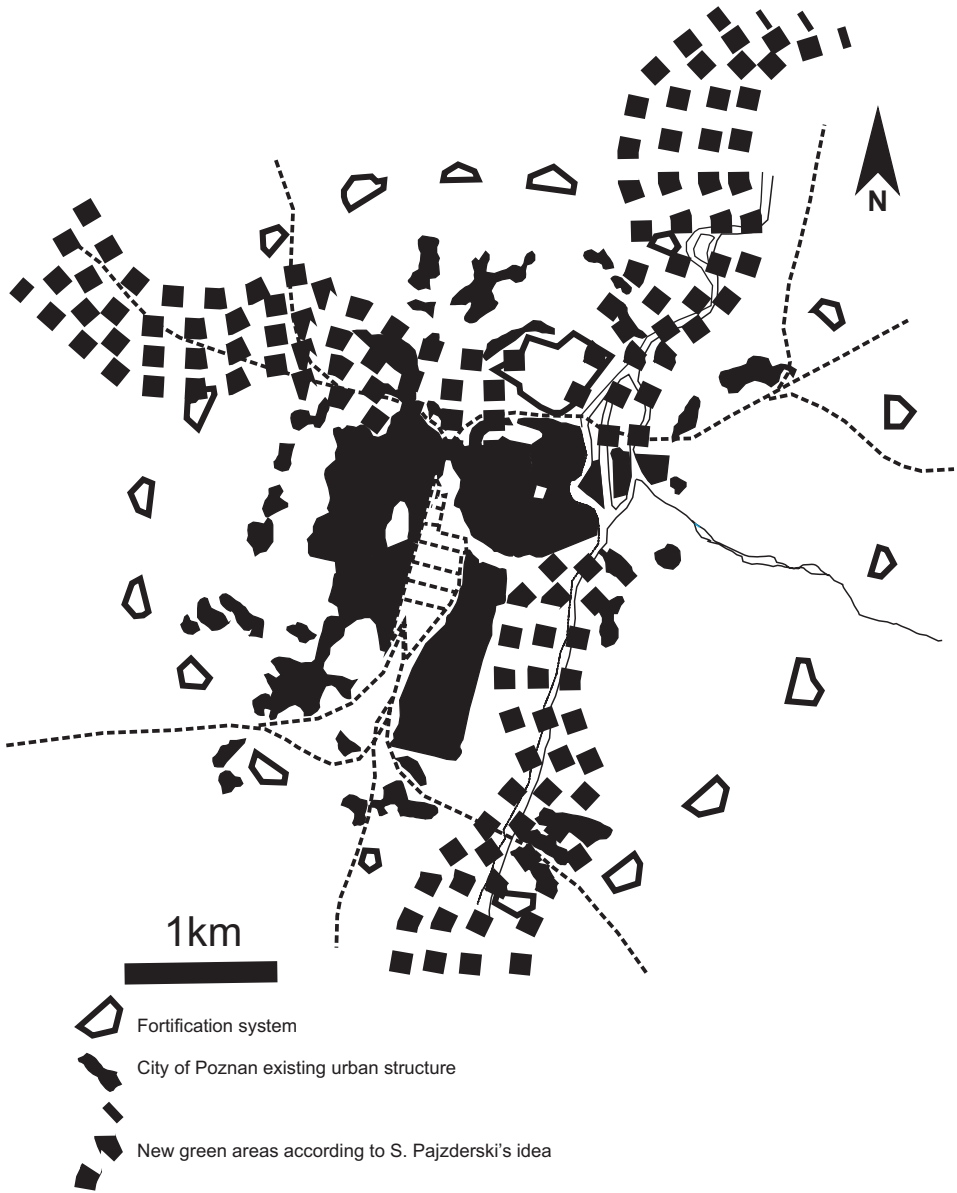


Fig. 6. Concept of Poznań green areas shaping according to S. Pajzderski's concept, based on the description placed in Poznań Chronicle (autor's elaboration)

of the 20th century but in a different form. We should bear in mind that from the point of view of an architect and town planner it is an interesting case documenting modern town planning thought in Poland. Pajzderski's concept and his designing activities (Warszawskie housing estate) became in a way a foundation for creation of a new framework for the town development in at the eastern bank

of the Warta river. As W. Czarnecki put it, 'the future of Poznań lies on the right bank of the Warta' (Czarnecki 1949, p. 139).

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## Poznań w czasach wczesnego modernizmu około roku 1929. Koncepcja nowoczesnego miasta w interpretacji architekta miejskiego Sylwestra Pajzderskiego

**Streszczenie:** Niniejszy artykuł prezentuje koncepcję rozwoju nowożytnego Poznania w okresie wczesnego modernizmu autorstwa Sylwestra Pajzderskiego. W związku z tym, że w oryginalnej publikacji opisu założeń przestrzennych z roku 1929 nie umieszczono rysunków, auto artykułu podjął próbę pewnego rodzaju rekonstrukcji wybranych założeń projektowych. Szczególny nacisk położono na ukazanie propozycji zmiany kompozycji i struktury miasta w odniesieniu do zabudowy mieszkaniowej, terenów zielonych i przemysłu. Przedstawiona w niniejszym artykule koncepcja rozwoju nowożytnego miasta autorstwa Sylwestra Pajzderskiego z końca lat 20. XX w. była odzwierciedleniem ówczesnych zapotrzebowań miasta. Nie była tak rewolucyjna jak późniejsza działalność W. Czarneckiego w planie ogólnym miasta Poznania z roku 1934. Niemniej jednak nosiła znamiona wiedzy i praktyki urbanistycznej. Należy mieć na uwadze fakt, że z punktu widzenia urbanisty jest ona ciekawym przypadkiem dokumentującym nowoczesną myśl urbanistyczną na obszarze Polski.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Poznań, modernizm, miasto nowoczesne, urbanistyka, planowanie przestrzenne

