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NIEDŹWIEDNIK

Historical and spatial study for NARRACJE 2024 festival

Niedźwiednik – an estate forming part of Brętowo district – stretches high above Gdańsk, on moraine hills north of Słowackiego Street. The entire quarter occupies an area of 7.23 sq km and has 7529 inhabitants with a density of 1041 persons per sq km. From the north, Brętowo neighbours Oliwa and VII Dwór; from the east, Upper Wrzeszcz. On the south, the district borders with Piecki-Migowo and Jasień, and on the west, with Matarnia. Forests of the Tricity Landscape Park cover almost half of Brętowo, so much of the district's borders run through woodland, thus being difficult to demarcate. Brętowo is divided into several smaller territorial units: Lipnik, Niedźwiednik, Nowiec, Matemblewo and Obręb Leśny Matemblewo (*Matemblewo Forest Division*). Located in the north of Brętowo, Niedźwiednik is a part of the district where residential architecture prevails, both the multi-family and single-family types. It is also the seat of the Brętowo District Council and a branch of the Voivodeship and City Public Library in Gdańsk. The estate features several interestingly located and well-equipped playgrounds. The origins of Niedźwiednik date back to the 13th century, but before the 1970s, it did not function as the densely developed estate that is so familiar to residents of Gdańsk today. Niedźwiednik is located around 3 km northwest of the centre of Wrzeszcz. After World War II, Brętowo lost its previous industrial character due to the developing single-family architecture and the emergence of the multi-family Niedźwiednik estate between 1978 and 1983. Against the background of Gdańsk's other large estates, such as Przymorze, Zaspą, Żabianka or Morena, Niedźwiednik clearly stands out, mostly due to its architectural qualities: an estate built on moraine hills and surrounded by the Tricity Landscape Park. At the time, the apartments designed there were in the so-called upper residential standard, meaning they were around 10 sq m larger than in other residential estates in Gdańsk. Niedźwiednik still enjoys a good reputation among Gdańsk locals and is regarded as a good place to live, although it is experiencing depopulation like the whole of Brętowo.

Location

Niedźwiednik is an extremely interesting example of two overlapping systems: urban and woodland. In terms of architecture, what clearly distinguishes the quarter are its high-rise estates built on the slopes and tops of moraine hills, surrounded by forests. The area of Niedźwiednik is a fragment of a moraine plateau crossed by numerous valleys.

Perhaps the best example of the estate's different elevations is found in Niedźwiednik Street, which ranges from 47 m a.s.l. to over 100 m a.s.l. in its most extreme section.

The estate, located in the northeast of Brętowo, partially delineates two of its borders: from the north, it is adjacent to VII Dwór, and from the east, to Upper Wrzeszcz. The quarter's remaining borders run within Brętowo: from the south, it is marked out by Słowackiego Street; from the west, it crosses through the Tricity Landscape Park. Northwest of Niedźwiednik is Lipnik, and Cieniawa Hill is to the southwest. Right next to Niedźwiednik's eastern limit is Węglisko, a ravine with lignite deposits that were probably locally exploited in the past. Niedźwiednik's main link with the city is Słowackiego Street, which connects Wrzeszcz with the airport. Potokowa Street, crossing Piecki-Migowo and Siedlce, links the estate with Śródmieście. After 1945, Brętowo evolved from an industrial to a residential quarter. For the most part, Niedźwiednik is a prefabricated high-rise estate constructed in the vicinity of large green areas, and this is what Gdańsk locals associate it with. Residents of Gdańsk perceive the estate as a separate district, despite being aware that it forms an administrative part of Brętowo. The estate features direct access points to the forest, so leisure areas are easily reachable. Interestingly, in communist Poland, Niedźwiednik was a perfect spot for skiing and other winter sports. Before the estate was erected – and even during its construction – locals would schuss the slopes of Niedźwiednik's high forest hills.

Gdańsk-based poet and writer Paweł Huelle recalled in *30 dni* magazine that as a kid, he would ski with his father down the ravine of the disused railway line to Kokoszki, under the bridge, up until the vicinity of the Brętowo church and the present-day allotment gardens (that had not yet been set up at the time). Soldiers stationed nearby, in the Wrzeszcz barracks, also often indulged themselves in skiing. Rumour has it that some were highlanders who regularly amazed the locals with their skiing prowess. Niedźwiednik is linked with downtown Gdańsk (Śródmieście), Wrzeszcz and Morena. Communication between these districts definitely improved after the launch of the Pomeranian Metropolitan Railway. Brętowo is the only district with two PMR stations: Niedźwiednik and Brętowo. The Gdańsk-Niedźwiednik station is located on a railway embankment at around 65 m a.s.l., on the destroyed historical line connecting Wrzeszcz and Stara Piła.

On the outskirts of the prefab high-rise estate and in the valley between the hills, around existing single-family architecture along Niedźwiednik and Leśna Góra Streets, are new single-family terraced buildings. They refer to the pre-war architecture of the area: single-family houses.

Elements of the district

Residential

Niedźwiednik is primarily occupied by residential architecture and woodland. What stands out in the residential part are 1-storey single-family buildings located on Niedźwiednik Street, formerly called *Birenwinkel*, and Leśna Góra Street. During the expansion, or rather the construction of the housing estate in the 1970s, storeys were added to some of the houses, and the mansard roofs were altered. Before the war, the area was characterised by very homogeneous buildings, not unlike the Wileńska Street in neighbouring Piecki-Migowo. The houses at the foot of moraine hills, together with gardens and outbuildings, were built for lower-ranking soldiers from the 'hussars of death' garrison. The higher-ranking officers lived closer to the barracks, in much more elegant buildings.

The Niedźwiednik housing estate that gave shape to the area was designed by Danuta Dzierżanowska and Szczepan Baum. It was built between 1978 and 1983 but the first designs and spatial studies were made already in the early 1970s. In 1974, Maria Czernichowska, in collaboration with Krzysztof Hueckel, prepared a study of the area's disposition, which formed the basis for further work on the character and size of the future housing estate. The study covered an area of 120 hectares, which is slightly larger than the final estate, as it incorporated the former military training ground on Potokowa Street to the south of Słowackiego Street. As most of the land for the planned housing estate was unused, it was chosen as the perfect location. Niedźwiednik was built in two stages in the large panel system. One of the most important guidelines for the designers was to plan the development so as to emphasise the visual qualities of the area. During its construction, 11 residential buildings and 23 outbuildings were removed due to their poor technical condition (most were wooden). To avoid eroding the slopes and escarpments, the new buildings were located on the cut tops of the hills, and the terrace buildings on the slopes. The most valuable areas in terms of landscape and nature were left in their natural formation. The concept of stacked buildings with varying terrace heights stemmed from the desire to preserve the character of the natural landscape and emphasise it with the way the buildings were formed. The higher buildings were situated on the plateaus, and the lower ones were on the slopes. The valley of the shooting range was left undeveloped and designated as a playing field and sports grounds.

The buildings and spatial facilities have characteristic semi-circular plastic elements in the balcony areas, further emphasised by different colours, which is a distinguishing feature of the estate.

Nowadays, after thermal retrofits and the application of colours to the entire façades of the blocks, they have lost this characteristic feature.

The 4- and 5-storey buildings are modelled on the documentation of the Zatorze II housing estate in Kwidzyn. The 7- and 11-storey blocks, on the other hand, were built in the large-panel technology. The housing estate was erected in two stages, starting with the construction of the first blocks in 1978. In stage one, four buildings were constructed for workplaces and three buildings for the Workers' Housing Cooperative, with "Inwestprojekt" as the investor. At this stage, 240 flats with a total area of 14,174 sq m were completed.

In the layout of the housing development, interiors were meant to be open towards the south, southeast and southwest. A service centre and a recreational and sports space for residents were designed in the central point of the housing estate. The second part of Niedźwiednik consisted of five multi-family housing tasks, which were already under construction in 1981. Niedźwiednik II consists of 1396 flats with an area of 75,983 sq m meant to accommodate 4763 people. Also in this part, terrace buildings for 102 flats were designed, which were located on slopes inaccessible for multi-family housing. The average apartment size in Niedźwiednik is 54.43 sq m. The general contractor was the Gdańskie Przedsiębiorstwo Budownictwa Mieszkaniowego (Gdańsk Residential Housing Enterprise).

One of the most interesting developments in Niedźwiednik are the terraced houses with an unusual 'staircase' layout. This atypical shape was necessitated by the location on a slope. The buildings were erected between 1987 and 1989 on the initiative of the Inter-factory Housing Cooperative "Własna Chata", which, under a notarial agreement of 1982, became the perpetual usufructuary of the land. The first designs by Ryszard Gruda and Teofila Labiedź-Gruda in cooperation with Przemysław Łapiński and Bogdan Kledzik were created in 1985.

Tricity Landscape Park and Oliwa Forest

Niedźwiednik's greatest natural assets are its forests, encroaching on Brętowo's administrative borders almost from three sides. These are the outskirts of a large woodland stretching along the Gdańsk Hillside, including the forests around Matemblewo and a fragment of the Tricity Landscape Park – the green lungs of Niedźwiednik and Brętowo's other estates. This proximity of woodland had a profound impact on the appearance of Niedźwiednik. Despite many transformations and damages, the forests of Brętowo are still extremely attractive from the natural viewpoint and contain beautiful fragments of tree stands, rich forest flora, and valuable biotopes. To the northwest of Niedźwiednik is the Wąwóz Huzarów (Hussar Gorge) nature reserve, where one may find clusters of a rare and protected fern: the deer fern.

Brętowo itself does not currently include protected areas or natural monuments. Large sections of the district are areas generally catalogued as so-called wasteland. These are pits of old clay mines used for the brickyards, plus gravel and sand pits that used to occupy a large part of Brętowo. The area currently features rather varied non-forest vegetation, such as grasslands with grey hair-grass or more sophisticated grasslands, with a much broader representation of flora, such as the partially protected dwarf everlast or patches of *Cytisus* plants. The latter is quite an interesting community, most prevalent in the coastal area, with the Scotch broom being the most important species. The largest areas covered by *Cytisus* plants are on the slopes of former pits, including Niedźwiednik. Dark green *Cytisus* patches, which come to life with yellow flowers in June, are a typical feature of Brętowo's natural environment. No other district of Gdańsk may boast such attractive and large swathes of *Cytisus* plants.

deer fern

Scotch broom

Another part of Brętowo's green areas is Oliwa Forest (*Òlëwsczé Lasë* in Kashubian), which forms the southern part of the Tricity Landscape Park. Until 1772, it belonged to the Oliwa Cistercian abbey, and after the 1st division of Poland, it was incorporated into the Royal Sobbowitz Forest. In 1920, when the Free City of Danzig was established, the Oliwa Forest was crossed by the border between Poland and the Free City. The forest is currently owned by the Gdańsk Forestry Commission. Its typical feature are valleys with an inclination of 40% and a difference in elevation of up to 80 m, which has created an area with a rich microclimate. The woodland is crossed by two communication arteries: Spacerowa and Słowackiego streets. There are also tourist routes: Kartuski (blue), Skarszewski (green), and Wzgórz Szymbarskich (black). The area also includes a very aptly named Niedźwiedzia Dolina (Bear Valley).

History and architecture

Niedźwiednik (German: *Bärenwinkel*) was a manor established in an area since 1283 owned by the Cistercian abbey in Oliwa.

The Brętowo village emerged around 1600 in the vicinity of today's intersection of Potokowa and Słowackiego streets. Its creation was directly related to the construction of water facilities on the Strzyża, which powered the new industrial plants in the area, such as mills and iron forges. In 1611, when the abbey's estate was divided between the abbot and the order, Niedźwiednik was given to the order. In the early 17th century, it was leased to the Schmieden

family of patricians from Gdańsk. In 1787, Korfanti Schmieden sold the estate to the owner of Lubkowo, Carl Sack, thus uniting Niedźwiednik with the neighbouring Kamienny Młyn. Between 1748 and 1809, over more than 60 years, today's Brętowo was successfully managed by two related families: the Schachts and the Sacks. A brickyard operated in the area since 1798. Since 1809, the Kamienny Młyn and Niedźwiednik estates were leased, and in 1827, they were put to auction. In 1824, both parts of Brętowo, Nowiec and Srebrzysko were purchased by Rozetta Schmidt, who united them into a single estate. The centre of the village was on the western side of the present-day intersection of Słowackiego and Potokowa streets. In 1885, the village had a population of 216 and boasted a two-class school. The area changed as a result of developments at the turn of the 20th century. Existing brickyards in Brętowo intensified their operations, and new ones also appeared. The moraine hills around Strzyża Valley – a rich source of clay and gravel to produce bricks – were destroyed by numerous excavation sites. Even after World War II, aggregate was still intensely obtained from the area. In 1913, a single-track railway line from Wrzeszcz to Kokoszki was laid through Brętowo. It was demolished in 1945 as a result of military operations – most of the engineering structures were either destroyed or in very poor condition. In the mid-1930s, the village – along with Jaśkowy Młyn, Kamienny Młyn and Niedźwiednik – occupied an area of 372 ha and had a population of 1845. During the war, it boasted a brickyard, two factories (producing batteries and hammers) and two inns with reception halls. After the war, the area was inhabited by Germans, who were gradually leaving for Germany, residents whose identity was torn and they were not sure whether to stay in Gdańsk or move to Germany, as well as Gdańsk locals and Kashubians of Polish origin.

On 28 March 1949, the locality was officially renamed to Niedźwiednik, a Polish translation of the earlier German name *Bärenwinkel*, meaning Bear Corner. The word *bäre* also means a sow, and since pigs grazed in today's Niedźwiednik, this interpretation of the name is also possible. The Niedźwiednik housing estate, designed by Danuta Dzierżanowska and Szczepan Baum, was constructed between 1978 and 1983. At the time, the architecture was directed to the west of Słowackiego Street. Starting from 1 September 1945, the former German school was transformed into the Polish General School no. 28, later renamed Primary School no. 38, which in 1997 moved to a new building at 2 Leśna Góra Street. Community Primary School 'Niedźwiednik' at 83 Słowackiego Street opened in 1992, and St. John Baptist de la Salle School at 101 Słowackiego Street in 2000. A large pig breeding facility of the Pilaszewski family operated here since 1945. It was subsequently nationalised and managed by Agril, which leased it to Borys Martysz. After him, the facility was managed by Centrala Mięsna, and from October 1951, by Gdańskie Zakłady Gastronomiczne.

Notable objects and places

Shooting range

The former military shooting range in Niedźwiednik used to stretch across the valley, from the present-day parking adjacent to School no. 38 until the edge of the forest at the end of Niedźwiednik Street. The shooting range operated until the mid-1980s. Soon after the area was demilitarized, construction began on the estate and terrace architecture typical for the quarter. A primary school was built in the late 1990s, and the old shooting range is now a playing field. The shooting range used to include a high embankment on which targets were placed with posts for the soldiers. After the end of the exercises, the column of soldiers would take Słowackiego Street back to the barracks. The neighbouring hills also feature German trench lines, underlining the area's military past.

Gen. Stanisław Maczek Primary School no. 38 and St. John Baptist de la Salle School

There are currently three schools in Niedźwiednik, two of which share a common history: Primary School no. 38 at 2 Leśna Góra Street and St. John Baptist de la Salle School run by the congregation of the Brothers of the Christian Schools (Lasallian Brothers) at 101 Słowackiego Street. The history of both schools is linked thanks to the present-day 101 Słowackiego building. In 1945, it housed the Polish General School in Brętowo (today's school no. 38), with 85 children taught in five classes. The building was constructed in the 1920s to serve as a general German school. Until today, the school features concrete steps on the embankment, which used to connect the older part with the newer one, built between 1983 and 1984. For years, they served as background for yearbook group photos by subsequent generations of students. When the school started operations in the 1940s, it mostly taught the Polish language to locals, almost 100% of whom were German-speaking. The building was also in need of repairs due to the sustained war damages. In the 1950s, up until the early 1960s, the schoolyard housed the annual August harvest festival.

In 1992, the facility was renamed in honour of Gen. Stanisław Maczek, and 1 September 1997 marked yet another new stage in the school's life as it moved to a new building on Leśna Góra Street. It was erected between 1995 and 1997, with the sports complex commissioned the following year. In 2005, the school celebrated its 70th anniversary: to commemorate the event, the school's community funded a memorial plaque at the main entrance.

In 2000, the former building of Primary School no. 38 accommodated the St. John Baptist de la Salle School, which moved from the nearby Piecki-Migowo.

Węglisko

Węglisko is a deep ravine near the eastern side of Góralska Street. Before the war, it was called *Braunkohlen Schlucht*. This was where lignite was mined in the open-pit technology, which is why the ravine walls are very steep.

Cieniawa Hill

One of the hills around Niedźwiednik is Cieniawa. It rises to 110.6 m a.s.l. and is located to the west of the estate, within the Tricity Landscape Park. The name Cieniawa was introduced in 1949. Before, the hill was called *Wald Berg*, or Forest Mountain, like one of Niedźwiednik's main streets.

Lipnik

Lipnik, *Leipzig* in German, previously known as Jakubowo, is located in the Oliwa Forest. Built in the mid-19th century, it used to be a small landed estate. Today, the only remnant of its heyday is a granite millstone, destroyed in the 1990s, and a several-hundred-year-old linden tree. The birch alley connecting Lipnik and VII Dwór used to be a dirt road known as Lipnicka or Jakubowska Droga. The Lipnik estate was destroyed by the Russians in 1945 during the struggle for the city.

Wąwóz Huzarów

Just beyond Niedźwiednik's western border is the extremely interesting nature reserve called Wąwóz Huzarów (Hussar Gorge). It was established in 2005 on 2.80 ha of land as a florist reserve meant to preserve the sites of rare and protected plants. The Hussar Gorge covers a narrow, steep-walled erosion fissure and a part of the adjacent upland situated on the edge of the Kashubian Lake District hillside. 117 species of vascular plants were recorded there, two of which are under partial protection: deer fern and stiff clubmoss. Interestingly, several species usually found in submontane and mountainous areas were also discovered, such as red elderberry, *Glyceria nemoralis*, grey alder, wood speedwell and yellow pimpernel. The emergence of 9 plant species from the list of endangered and threatened vascular plants of Western Pomerania testifies to the reserve's high natural value. These are herb Christopher,

pyramidal bugle, one-flowered wintergreen, bog stitchwort, *Glyceria nemoralis*, deer fern, wood speedwell, *Bromus benekenii* and wood vetch.

Bycze Wzgórze

Just before Niedźwiednik, on the south-eastern side, is an extremely interesting place known as Bycze Wzgórze (Bull Hill). Archaeological research conducted *in situ* indicates that this was a proto-Slavic place of worship. Right now, it serves as a scenic viewpoint over Gdańsk. According to studies, a stone circle could have been located here, alongside a sacrificial altar and a wooden obelisk depicting the four-faced Svetovit.

Statues and sculptures

Sculpture depicting bears

“Bear’s Boulder” natural monument

Sources of information and photographs:

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Dziennik Bałtycki

30 dni magazine

Radio Gdańsk

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