REVALORIZATION OF HISTORIC WOODEN PENSION IN POLISH HEALTH RESORT RABKA ZDROJ

Kazimierz Kuśnierz¹, Dominika Kuśnierz-Krupa²

¹ Cracow University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, The Institute of History of Architecture and Monument Preservation, address e-mail: kusnierzkazimierz@poczta.onet.pl

² Cracow University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture, The Institute of History of Architecture and Monument Preservation, dkk@zeriba.pl

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Abstract. Rabka Zdroj is a medieval town located in the south of Lesser Poland Voivodeship. It became a health resort in 1861, on the initiative of Julian Zubrzycki, but the first 164 patients were formally accepted three years later. In this period, the main axes of the health resort complex were designed and the resort park was opened. The health resort’s functioning was based on four springs of iodine-bromine brine named: "Rafaela", "Maria", "Krakus" and "Kazimierz”, in the vicinity of which a centre with the Spa House, a covered promenade, a chemist’s and a restaurant were located. In their close neighbourhood pensions were built which, by 1882, included 15 buildings with 240 rooms for patients, and their number increased each year. These buildings, initially mostly wooden, possessed features of traditional architecture of the Podhale region, while at the same time they alluded to the then used European models. As has been mentioned above, currently most structures are in poor technical condition and there are no concepts how to use them. Naturally, the best solution would be restoring them to their original function of pensions, but functional - technical requirements that such buildings have to meet at present are different then 100 years ago, and difficult to fulfil within the existing structure of a historic pension - a medium-size object situated usually on a small plot in the rigorous conservation protection zone of Rabka Zdroj, which negatively influences the economic aspect of such an investment. It is necessary to look for other functions e.g. commercial and service, office or welfare, which will allow for their current maintenance; moreover their revalorization will be profitable for potential investors. One pension in Rabka Zdroj which, unused nowadays, has been waiting for revalorization is pension “Wawel” located in the very heart of the health resort, in the main Jan Pawel II Avenue. The structure was built in the first part of the 20th century as a pension connected with health resort function of Rabka. Recently, the building project has been designed to adapt the former pension into an old people's home.
1 HISTORY OF THE HEALTH RESORT

This article addresses the issue of revalorisation of historic architecture of Polish health resorts on the example of the villa Wawel in Rabka-Zdroj. Rabka Zdroj is a medieval town located in the south of Lesser Poland Voivodeship. The town is situated between the two mountain ranges, the Gorce and the Beskid Wyspowy, and was founded between two medieval villages of Rabka and Słone.

Rabka became a health resort in 1861, on the initiative of Julian Zubrzycki, though its salt springs had already been known since the medieval times. Julian Zubrzycki inherited Rabka from his father Joseph who had bought the land from the Wielopolski family. Before Rabka became a health resort in 1861, in 1857 the Balneology Commission of the Krakow Scientific Society expressed some interest in the town. They commissioned dr Fryderyk Skrobel to carry out a chemical analysis of the water in Rabka, which turned out to possess high medicinal value. That diagnosis encouraged Julian Zubrzycki to further activity aimed at opening a health resort in Rabka. His efforts supported by prof. Józef Dietl were formally finalised in 1864, when the first 164 patients were admitted. Within one season four springs of iodine-bromine brine were uncovered: “Rafaela”, “Maria”, “Krakus” and “Kazimierz” [1].

After 1864, the main axes of the health resort complex were designed and the resort park was opened (Fig.1). The road leading from the village to Zdroj (present-day Orkana Street) acquired the form of a tree-lined avenue. The centre of the health resort was designed right by the first springs in Rabka. It was there that the multi-storey Spa House called the Kurhaus was located which, unfortunately, no longer exists. The building boasted a salon for visitors and 28 guest rooms on the upper floor, with 20 bathrooms on the ground floor. Besides the Spa House, one of the first enterprises financed by Zubrzycki was building a roofed promenade for clients, which ran parallel to the building with bathrooms. Apart from the Spa House and the promenade, in the resort centre there was also a chemist’s and a restaurant with a concert hall [2]. The health resort developed quickly; in 1867 it consisted of three one-storey pensions and two masonry houses, offering rooms to let. A shop with luxury goods and stables for the clients’ horses were also built in Rabka during the period of our interest. In 1871, building of a grange and a sheepfold started. In 1882 the health resort complex in Rabka consisted of 15 pension buildings with 240 rooms for clients, a chapel and a summer house intended as a venue for concerts given by the local orchestra. In 1888, M. Suligowski prepared a plan of Rabka, in which he presented the new spatial layout of the resort with 18 pensions [3].

A more intensive development of Rabka in the 1880s resulted from the railway connection established between Rabka and Chabówka, which took place in 1885. Thanks to better accessibility of the place, the number of clients visiting Rabka increased almost 10 times. During the following years, the medical care in the resort was geared towards treating children, who initially stayed in the building of the so called ‘colony’ run by the Society of School Care for Children, and later, since 1903 in a new building [4].

The year 1895 commenced a new stage in the development of the resort, connected with the change of its owner. Rabka was purchased by the Kaden family who, for the next ten years, invested their earnings in expanding the health resort, and improving its infrastructure. At that time e.g. the sewage system and waterworks were built, and the town was electrified. Another important undertaking was increasing the area of the resort park (up to 80 morgas ≈ 112 acres), in which a network of park lanes, garden features, as well as a cricket pitch and a tennis court were designed [5].

The development of Rabka in the interwar period was subordinate to the guidelines of the regulation plan prepared by the Ministry of Public Health. The health resort downtown began to crystallise along Orkan Street. During the discussed period many modernist villas and sana-
toriums were built in Rabka, e.g. along the already mentioned Orkana street, as well as on the slopes of Bania [6].

2 WOODEN VILLAS IN RABKA – THE HISTORY

The health resort buildings in Rabka can be divided into three phases. The first was represented by such objects as: villa “Luboń” or the “Pod Trzema Różami” hotel (Fig.2), in the architecture of which one can see allusions to the classicist models from the 1st half of the 19th century. The proof of those can be found in the colonnaded porticos in the front elevations. In turn, the shapes of the mentioned objects and their gable roofs with eaves resting on rafters, and roofs projecting over the gable faces brings to mind inspirations taken from “Swiss” or “Tyrolean” architecture [7].

The second stage refers to pensions built in the 2nd half of the 19th century and encompasses several types, all of which basically allude to the so called “Alpine” style combined with eclecticism. While listing some features characteristic for that group of objects one should mention: their compact plan, the bulk covered with a gable roof enlivened by axially situated gables and porches, as well as ornamental woodcarvings. Such villas as e.g. “Kazimierz” (Fig.3), ”Warszawa” (Fig.4) and “Pod Gwiazdą” can serve as examples of pensions erected during the described stage [8].

The third stage in the architecture of the Rabka villas meant the appearance of elements in the Zakopane style at the beginning of the 20th century. Examples of such a way of thinking in the architecture of Rabka are e.g. the building of the colony of St. Louis Children’s Hospital in Krakow, designed by a famous architect Józef Pokutyński (Fig.5), and villa “Wierchy”. The colony building has a symmetrical plan. Its front elevation is emphasised by three risalits with gables in the Zakopane style. Two-storey porches were designed along its back elevation. Pension “Wierchy”, on the other hand, is characterised by slightly less decorative details than the colony building, but its architecture was also influenced by the Zakopane style [9].

3 WOODEN VILLAS IN RABKA - NOWADAYS

Until today the typical historic wooden architecture in the form of old pensions can be admired in the health resort area. Unfortunately, some of them were demolished in 1975, and the majority of those remaining are in a very poor state of preservation. Only a few of the former wooden pensions of Rabka from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century have been successfully renovated, due to which they can still remind us about the rich history of the health resort (Fig.6, 7, 8, 9).

4 VILLA “WAWEL”

One of the villas in Rabka which, currently unused, has been waiting for revalorisation is villa “Wawel”, located in the very heart of the health resort, in the main street - Jan Paweł II Avenue. The object was built at the beginning of the 20th century as a pension meant to serve the spa function in Rabka. It contained guest rooms for clients, a common section (a common room with a dining room) and a maintenance section (Fig.10, 11). After World War II, after years of prosperity, the pension fell into decline. Its technical state badly deteriorated during the period when the premises were used by a primary school. After its closure, in the first years of the 21st century, the object remained unused for some years until the moment when, in 2010, a private investor bought it from the Nowy Targ County. In this way villa “Wawel”
has been given a chance to survive and, first of all, to be restored to its former glory (Fig.12, 13, 14, 15).

Villa “Wawel” is surrounded by typical health resort buildings in the form of pensions and former sanatoriums with fascinating spa architecture from the turn of the 19th and 20th century. Along the street the plot is lined with trees. Besides the adapted building, on the plot covering the area of 3532 m² there is also a garage with utility rooms. The villa itself is a two-storey building with a functional attic. There is also a cellar under a part of the building. The structural layout of the building is mixed. The villa has a wooden purlin and rafter truss on which rests a steep gable roof, currently covered with corrugated iron sheets that replaced traditional shingles. The building was erected using a traditional timber technology with tie beam walls built from logs. It has wooden beam ceilings. In the cellar section, the walls were made from broken stone, and so were the foundations.

As has been mentioned above, currently the building is unused, and its technical condition is bad, therefore the owner decided to carry out a conservation renovation of the villa. It was decided that a new function, though related to its original one, will be introduced into the revalorised object. Namely, villa “Wawel” will become an old people’s home. Adaptation of the villa will not require altering its outline, or outside proportions. Though the building has not been entered into the immovable monuments register of Lesser Poland Voivodeship, it is listed in the county monument register. Then in the Local Plan of Spatial Development which currently is being verified again, the area where the discussed object is situated has been included in the ”A” zone of the health resort, which at the same time is the zone of conservation protection. The above means that the project ought to be approved by the local monument conservator. Because of the unquestionable architectonic value of the pension, its adaptation will primarily involve adapting its functional – spatial layout to a selected function with a conservative approach to the building elevation and materials used in it.

The villa is a wooden object, therefore a technical expert opinion concerning the state of this structure and building materials used in it were indispensable before setting about the project. The opinion was prepared by an authorised construction engineer with many years of experience in designing e.g. wooden objects. It had been preceded by inventorying the structure and inspections on the site. Expert opinion revealed that the object was in a very poor state of preservation which referred both to the foundations, interior and exterior walls on all storeys, wooden ceilings and the roof construction. Conclusions of the construction opinion resulted in the necessity to re-design the building structure. It was decided that that the whole substance which was not fit for further exploitation ought to be replaced with identical construction (ceiling beams, load-bearing elements of interior walls, stairs, logs from which the exterior walls were built) and decorative elements (woodcarvings). In order to carry out the above described building project it will be necessary to partially dismantle the object, and then re-assembling it, partially using new construction elements and building materials.

The limits of project intervention were determined in the course of consultations and inspections on site, in the presence of the investor, designers and representatives of the Voivodeship Monument Protection Office in Krakow – Branch in Nowy Targ. As has been mentioned before, the villa will be used as an Old People’s Home, and in its basement (with the area of 348.15 m²) a service establishment was designed with storage and utility rooms. The ground floor (with the area of 321.10 m²), the first floor (with the area of 244.98 m²) and the attic (with the area of 156.86 m²) are meant to serve the primary function of the pension. On the cellar storey (basement), besides the above mentioned service establishment with the social room, also the kitchen with necessary space, back rooms for the pension employees (cloakrooms, toilets), as well as utility and storage space were designed. The ground floor encompasses the entrance zone with the reception, a room for therapy and rehabilitation, a din-
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ing room that could also serve as a day room, as well as six two- and three-bed rooms with bathrooms for clients. The first floor is fully designed for guest rooms for clients, with four-, three- or two-bed rooms, each with an en-suite bathroom, in total 5 sets of rooms. On the top floor – the attic – four more rooms for clients are planned, as well as an emergency medical care room, maintenance and utility rooms (a laundry, a drying room, storage).

The object has been adapted to the needs of the disabled by e.g. designing an exterior ramp, a lift and bathrooms adjusted for people in wheelchairs.

The project assumes re-creating all the details and decorative elements of the object, which were destroyed. It also involves replacing historic joinery with woodwork with identical divisions and size of profiles.

The area in the vicinity of the pension will also be modernised, which will involve e.g. building a driveway to the building, which will also serve as a fire escape route; building parking places for private cars; building a site for temporary collecting of rubbish, and planting new greenery.

The above described project is currently at the stage of necessary consultations, after which construction work will commence. The pension is planned to open in the spring of 2015. It is to be hoped that revalorisation of villa “Wawel” will be carried out thoroughly and as such will set an example for other investors to show that it is worth investing in the cultural heritage of Polish health resorts. In conclusion, it should be added that project enterprises of such type have always to be consulted with local conservation authorities in order to avoid too far interference into the form and substance of the object, as well as into the surrounding historic cultural landscape.

Figure 1: Plan of Rabka from 1888 acc. to M. Suligowski, [in:] Z. Beiersdorf, B. Krasnowolski, Rozwój przestrzenny i architektura Rabki, „Teka Komisji Urbanistyki i Architektur”, vol. XVI, 1982, Publ. PAN, O. Krakow, p.127
Figure 2: The “Pod Trzema Różami” Hotel in Rabka-Zdroj in the 1st half of the 20th century, on an old postcard, [in:] the Archive of the Department of HAUiSzP WA CUT

Figure 3: Pension “Kazimierz” in Rabka-Zdroj in the 1st half of the 20th century, on an old postcard, [in:] the Authors’ Archive

Figure 4: Pension “Warszawa” in Rabka-Zdroj in the 1st half of the 20th century, on an old postcard, [in:] the Authors’ Archive

Figure 5: The colony building of St. Louis Children’s Hospital in Rabka-Zdroj in the 1st half of the 20th century, on an old postcard, [in:] the Authors’ Archive
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Figure 6: The colony building of St. Louis Children’s Hospital in Rabka-Zdroj nowadays, photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa 2014

Figure 7: The building of a pension in Jan Pawel II Avenue in Rabka-Zdroj nowadays, photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa 2014

Figure 8: Pension “Porębianka” in Rabka-Zdroj nowadays, photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa 2014

Figure 9: Pension “Truskawka” in Rabka-Zdroj nowadays, photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa 2014

Figure 10: Villa “Wawel” in Rabka-Zdroj in the 1st half of the 20th century. View from the south. Copy of the photo [in:] the Authors’ Archive

Figure 11: Villa “Wawel” in Rabka-Zdroj in the 1st half of the 20th century, on an old postcard. View from the south-west, [in:] the Archive of the Department HAUiSzP WA CUT
Figure 1: Villa “Wawel” in Rabka-Zdroj nowadays. View from the south. Photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2013

Figure 2: Villa “Wawel” in Rabka-Zdroj nowadays. View from the east. Photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2013

Figure 3: Villa “Wawel” in Rabka-Zdroj nowadays. View from the west. Photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2013

Figure 4: Villa “Wawel” in Rabka-Zdroj nowadays. View from the west. Photo by D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, 2013

Figure 5: Villa “Wawel” in Rabka-Zdroj after revalorisation. Visualisation of the architectonic project prepared by Grupa Projektowa ZERIBA (D. Kuśnierz-Krupa, M. Krupa, Ł. Wesołowski), 2013/2014
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