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## *From a Residential Garden to an Inner-City Square: Transformations of the Space of the Saxon Garden in Warsaw*

### *Abstract*

A large proportion of today's European inner-city parks are former residential gardens that have been gradually incorporated into the public realm of cities. The Saxon Garden in Warsaw is an example of a park that has undergone a different evolution from most similar ensembles – instead of becoming an enclosed space, it has been transformed into an inner-city square accessible around the clock and traversed by numerous circulation routes. Its location next to Piłsudski Square, a place marked by a difficult history, means that the Garden remains a space that has never been fully conceptually resolved, entangled from the outset in a permanent state of spatial and functional tension resulting from the unstable urban fabric of its surroundings.

This article is based on an analysis of archival sources and the scholarly literature, as well as a detailed comparative analysis of the form, layout and furnishings of the Saxon Garden and its setting, which makes it possible to capture the specificity of its development against the background of transformations of public spaces in European city centres.

**Keywords:** Saxon Garden, public space, urban greenery, urban planning, park

### *Introduction*

Many contemporary public city parks are former residential gardens which, due to their location within growing urban boundaries or in their immediate vicinity, were gradually integrated with the city and now form part of its green inner-city public spaces. An interesting case of such a park is the Saxon Garden in Warsaw, laid out under Augustus II as the residential garden of the Saxon Axis. Today it functions more as a transitory inner-city square, woven into the city's circulation network.

The aim of this article is to answer the question of which elements in the changing accessibility of the Saxon Garden in Warsaw determined that a residential space of such outstanding historical significance transformed into an inner-city square with only a partially preserved structure. The time-

frame of the research spans from the creation of the garden in the 1720s to the present day.

### *State of Research*

Although the Saxon Garden has a relatively extensive literature – it appears both in publications on the forms of Polish historic gardens (Bobrowski 1954; Ciołek 1954) and in studies on the Saxon Axis (Bernatowicz 1995; Bieniecki 1960; Kłosek-Kozłowska 2017) – no one has so far attempted to answer why it turned into an inner-city square and which events determined this. The Saxon Garden appears partly in the context of the urbanism of Piłsudski Square and of the history directly related to the former Saxon Palace building (Zieliński 2019; Wójtowicz 2019; Rotterdam 1969; Jonkajtys-Luba 1995; Trybuś 2012; Stępiński 1988). All these works focus primarily on the space of the square itself, the sources of its decomposition, its transport value and buildings; the space of the Saxon Garden is treated marginally. The only monographic work devoted

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specifically to the Garden remains Elżbieta Charazińska's book (1979).

### *Description of the Research Method*

The applied research method consists in analysing how the function of the Saxon Garden has changed since its inception and what relationship the garden has had with the surrounding urban space, with particular attention to the built urban fabric, public spaces (their function and significance for the city) and the transport network. Equally important is a comparative analysis of the layout and forms of the Saxon Garden and its immediate setting. To this end, historical studies, city plans, iconographic materials and urban design projects (including unrealised ones) were analysed, as they reveal ways of thinking about this space – and the evolution thereof.

#### *A Private Court Garden within the Saxon Axis*

The Saxon Garden was created as one element of the late Baroque urban composition of the Saxon Axis, which initially served three functions: residential, military and transport (Bieniecki 1960, 484). In its early form it was a typical formal residential garden, functionally connected with the palace itself. As a private space it had no links with the urban public realm, even though it was already surrounded on all sides by the expanding city. This resulted from two factors.

First, the Saxon Axis began to be implemented in an area of pre-existing urban structures, which entailed extensive demolitions and expropriations and, above all, condemned the Saxon Garden from the moment of its creation to a spatial and functional deadlock in relation to an unstable urban fabric.

Second, the transport function of the Saxon Axis meant that the composition contained within its boundaries both

routes serving the royal residence and public roads (Bieniecki 1960, 486–487). Their location in the immediate vicinity of the Saxon Garden posed no problem in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, but the situation changed dramatically once the decision was made not to develop the Saxon complex any further while urban traffic continued to grow (Fig. 1).

According to Tadeusz Tołwiński, a series of city squares formed around the central mass of the Garden on a shared communication orbit in a later period: Teatralny, Bankowy, Piłsudskiego and Małachowskiego Squares (Tołwiński 1963, 159–160). Already in the early period, on the western side, the interior of the Garden was linked to the marketplace of Wielopole. From the east the palace forecourt was connected to the busy Krakowskie Przedmieście street. Królewska Street, bordering the Saxon Garden to the south, was regulated symmetrically to the existing northern road along the city walls, where private estates belonging to the Sanguszko family and later to Heinrich Brühl were also located (Bieniecki 1960, 473).

From 1735 the Garden was enclosed to the south by a brick wall with bastions; from the west access was provided by the Iron Gate (Żelazna Brama), to which guardhouses were later added (Charazińska 1979, 34). In social terms it was also an isolated space, although here certain changes can be observed. In many studies, 27 May 1727 is cited as the date on which the Saxon Garden was opened to the “inhabitants of the capital” or made accessible “to the public” (Charazińska 1979, 44). This aspect seems to require deeper study, since other examples of opening residential gardens to the public in Europe suggest that these could not have been the “inhabitants of the city” at large, but only selected representatives of the higher social strata. Paul Keenan (2010) offers a good analysis of the social structure of visitors to the Summer Garden in Saint Petersburg in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, citing decrees that specified who could enter the garden and when, and that set strict requirements for visitors' attire – it had to be “neat and European”. This alone meant that the visitors could only be a very narrow group of the better-born.

#### *The Garden in the Context of the Abandonment of the Saxon Axis*

The year 1763 brought a fundamental change in the direction of development for the Saxon Garden. At that time the Saxon Palace ceased to be a royal residence. The Garden therefore lost its function as a residential garden, and the funds allocated for its upkeep diminished, while the formula of its use became more relaxed. This is evidenced by facts cited by Charazińska (1979, 47–49): flower beds and parterres were replaced with lawns, benches appeared along the alleys, and Baroque structures were gradually replaced with rows of trees providing shade for walkers. Small kiosks selling beer were set up by the Iron Gate, at the entrance to the Garden. The water reservoir in the central part of the Garden, which had previously supplied the royal fountains, was turned into a place where cold drinks were sold, while baked goods from the bakery operating in a side wing of the former royal palace were carried through the alleys and sold to visitors. In 1804 the Grand Salon was converted into a dining pavilion (Charazińska 1979, 50–51).



Fig. 1. C.F. von Werneck, plan of Warsaw (fragment), scale approx. 1:2500–1:4200, 1732

(source: AGAD, Cartographic Collection, 86–21)

Il. 1. C.F. von Werneck, plan Warszawy (fragment), skala ok. 1 : 2500 – 1 : 4200, 1732

(źródło: AGAD, Zbiór Kartograficzny, 86–21)

During this period the Saxon Garden became surrounded by new streets and blocks of buildings developed without an overarching plan. The development of the Baroque axis had from the outset required excessive financial outlays and had already slowed down in the Saxon period (Bieniecki 1960, 490). When Stanisław August Poniatowski came to the throne, work on the Axis was entirely abandoned. In 1757 the Bielino jurisdiction was created, but it was not integrated into the transport network of the Saxon complex from the west, which meant that the development of its structure – including the main artery, later Marszałkowska Street – proceeded independently of the Saxon complex (Bieniecki 1960, 489). In the western part of the complex, around Chłodna Street, a network of new streets also emerged, including Grzybowska Street. However, it was not connected to Królewska Street, which could have created an east–west transport axis leading all the way to Krakowskie Przedmieście. Thus the eastern part, with the Garden, and the western part lost their connection.

This transitional period was also the time when the context of Saxon Square began to gain importance for the Garden. The former palace courtyard, which had served as yet another buffer for the Garden on the side of Krakowskie Przedmieście, began to evolve into a public square once the gates located on its northern and southern sides were removed in 1791 (Bieniecki 1960, 490). Indirectly this also brought the Saxon Garden closer to the city's public life – this time from the east. At the same time – a fact of great importance for the later period – removing the gates made it possible to create a transport route linking Wierzbowa Street with Ewangelicki (now Małachowskiego) Square, running directly along the western frontage of the Saxon Palace.

The period of the Duchy of Warsaw was a time of stagnation for the Garden: devastated and degraded, it ceased to be frequently visited; public life shifted to the Krasiński Garden, opened to the public in 1768. As in the case of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Saxon Garden, the social structure of visitors to the Krasiński Garden in this period requires study. When in 1816 Prince Konstanty, the viceroy of Warsaw, moved into the Brühl Palace, the Saxon Garden was reduced to a technical backyard – horses were grazed there and preparations for military parades were carried out (Charazińska 1979, 58).

### *Transformation into a City Park*

In terms of integration with the urban space, the period of the Congress Kingdom of Poland was the most dynamic for the Saxon Garden. Jarosław Zieliński notes that it was then that “the Saxon Garden (...) became more of an urban interior than a part of a palace complex” (Zieliński 2019, 117). In my view, at that time it was not part of a palace complex at all, as such a complex no longer existed. The building of the former palace, handed over to government administration at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, became a lycée in 1802, its wings were rented out as housing, and after being remodelled to a design by Waclaw Ritschel / Adam Idzkowski it was turned into a commercial tenement house (Bieniecki 1960, 492–493).

Tadeusz Bernatowicz writes that this was the time when “the process of incorporating the Saxon Garden into the

structure of the modern city” occurred (1995, 96); however, he does not add that this was part of a broader concept of regulating inner-city squares and ordering public spaces. This process, initiated by the Construction Council (Rada Budownicza), included the construction or reconstruction of representative squares: Zamkowy, Teatralny, Ewangelicki, Trzech Krzyży and Bankowy (Pietrzak-Pawłowska 1973, 25). Because of its location, the Saxon Garden had to be included in this process: to implement these plans, its administrative status had to be changed. In 1815 the Ministry of the Interior approached the Treasury Commission with a request to prepare a project for transforming the Saxon Garden into a public city park (Charazińska 1979, 58). This led to changes within the Garden (1815–1827) and its adaptation to the landscape style. The design was prepared by James Savage, succeeded after his death by gardener Jan Strobel (Bieniecki 1960, 493–494).

The Garden was considered in the context of creating a representative and functional sequence of urban interiors (Kłosek-Kozłowska 2017). This seems to be confirmed by seemingly minor yet important facts: when regulating Żelaznej Bramy Square, the Grand Salon was demolished in order to obtain a visual connection with the square, and the new entrance was set back deeper into the park (effectively at the cost of reducing its area); on the side facing Ewangelicki Square, the greenery was composed so that the body of the Evangelical church would be visible from the Garden; new gates were created (from Marszałkowska, Żabia, Niecała and Królewska Streets); the brick wall was replaced with an openwork fence. In this way the space of the Saxon Garden interpenetrated the surrounding urban space and together with it formed public spaces.

As part of the reconstruction of the former Saxon Palace in 1839–1842, the Garden received its most spectacular visual and transport connection with Saxon Square, created by piercing the central part of the palace body with a colonnaded passage (Zieliński 2019, 156). The Saxon Garden certainly took over the function of a well-performing and – in contemporary terms – engaging public space, which Saxon Square itself did not possess. This is evidenced by the rich service and entertainment infrastructure with which it was equipped throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In this respect it did not differ from other former residential gardens in Europe adapted to public use, such as Hyde Park in London, the Summer Garden in Saint Petersburg or the Tuileries in Paris. Yet one may ask whether this socially oriented role of the Saxon Garden did not also stem from a deliberate policy on the part of the authorities and whether it did not serve as a kind of “lightning rod” for the problematic space of Saxon Square, intended as a place for manifesting power (Fig. 2).

### *The Neighbourhood of Pilsudski Square*

The formula of the Saxon Garden as the exclusive “Salon of Warsaw” began to be exhausted at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The causes of this phenomenon have not yet been clearly identified. Social transformations and new needs of the urban community inhabiting adjacent areas, which the Garden was no longer able to satisfy at that stage, most like-



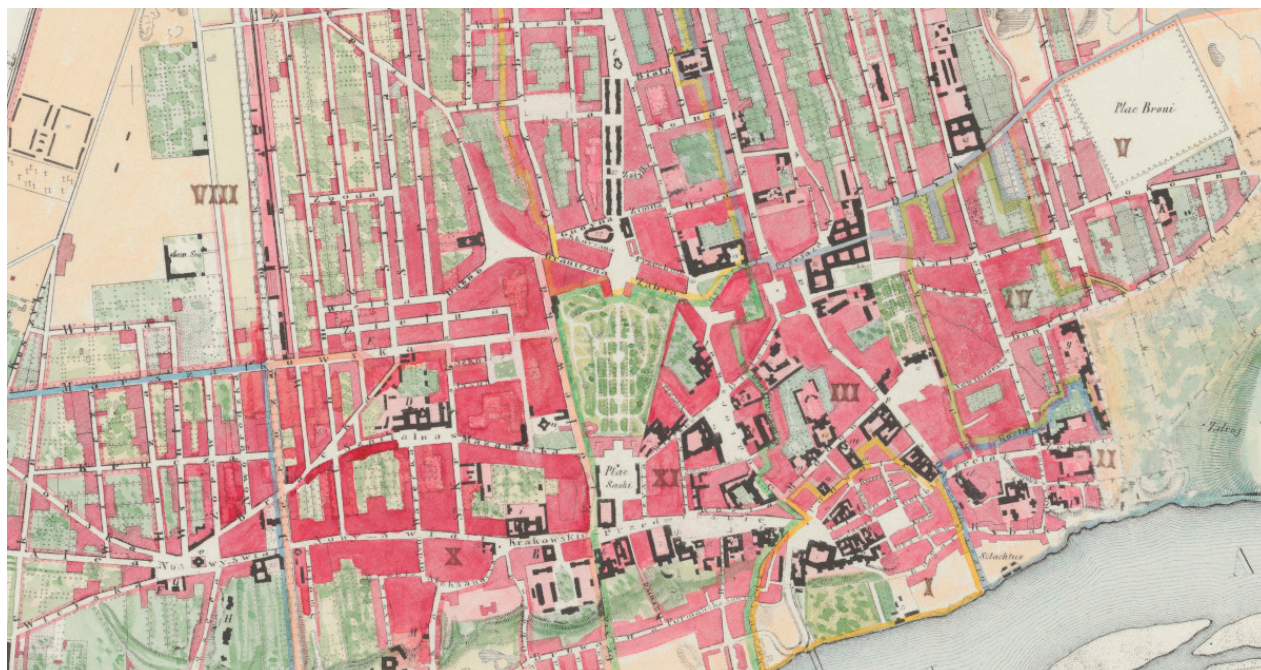


Fig. 2. Plan of Warsaw by officers of the General Staff of the Russian army, officers of the Corps of Military Engineers and Józef Koriot (fragment), scale approx. 1:4200, 1846 (source: Museum of Warsaw, ref. MHW 17386)

II. 2. Plan Warszawy oficerów Sztabu Generalnego armii rosyjskiej, oficerów Korpusu Inżynierów Wojskowych i Józefa Koriota (fragment), skala ok. 1:4200, 1846 (źródło: Muzeum Warszawy, sygn. MHW 17386)

ly played a part. The eastern side was becoming a grand, representative area of the city, with services aimed at a high-status clientele, the residences of the urban elite and a carefully conceived architectural setting. To the west of the Garden, by contrast, the district acquired a clearly industrial and commercial character, with marketplaces and dense residential development (Kłosek-Kozłowska 2017, 13–14).

The Saxon Garden was not helped in maintaining its prestige by the problematic proximity of Saxon Square which, instead of serving residents, was used by the occupying authorities to manifest their dominance. A symbol of this was the obelisk-monument to the Fallen Poles (officers loyal to the tsar) erected on the axis of the square in 1841 (Zieliński 2019, 144–150). Sold in 1864 by the heirs of Skwarcow to the Russian authorities, the Saxon Palace lost its commercial function – controversial from the perspective of its original use, but contributing to the animation of the surrounding space, including the Garden – and became the seat of military authorities. The ultimate dismantling of the spatial composition of Saxon Square came with the construction, in 1894–1912, of the Orthodox cathedral of St Alexander Nevsky, whose massive Byzantine-style body did not correspond to any of the existing buildings and dominated the Garden (Zieliński 2019, 176–183).

Surprisingly, the situation of the Saxon Garden in this respect did not improve after Poland regained independence. Saxon Square, marked by its difficult history, began to be treated as a space of memory, with a strong patriotic and representative dimension, with patriotic symbols placed there – the monument to Prince Józef Poniatowski and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier (Zieliński 2019, 222, 223). The square again became a place for parades, military re-

views and public demonstrations (Hübner-Wojciechowska 1991). It still did not provide a public function that would meet the everyday needs of residents.

### *Clash with the Transport Factor*

The urban development of Warsaw made the transport factor increasingly strongly affect the Saxon Garden, located across the main direction of the city's growth, which progressed largely on the north–south axis, parallel to the Vistula. With the growing importance of southern districts and the need to connect them with northern ones, a project to extend Marszałkowska Street through the Saxon Garden was already proposed in 1888, but public opposition halted its implementation (Bieniecki 1960, 510). The seven gates to the Garden at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century testified not only to the park's popularity but also to the fact that it was surrounded, from many sides, by a living urban organism clamouring for new routes (Fig. 3).

In 1904 the municipal authorities presented a concept for a vehicular connection through the Garden from the gate at Marszałkowska to the gate at Niecała (Charazińska 1979, 124). Before the First World War, a proposal was made to unblock traffic on the northern side – to connect Kotzebue Street (now Fredry) at the Garden's boundary with Saxon Square through the Brühl Palace site (Charazińska 1979, 130, 131). Although neither of these ideas was realised, the internal structures of the park were adapted – the number of flowerbeds and lawns was reduced in favour of new alleys, which testified to the need to create a miniature network of routes within the Saxon Garden to link the parts of the city lying on its opposing sides.

Modernism in urbanism – to put it briefly and synthetically – was characterised by privileging motorised traffic in cities and simultaneously abandoning the values of traditional urbanism in the creation of multifunctional public spaces (Stangel 2013, 29–39). A park located in the very city centre occupied an area where new arterial roads could be routed. In 1917 Tolwiński revived the idea of a thoroughfare through the western part of the Garden – i.e., extending Marszałkowska Street to Bankowy Square (Tolwiński 1917). The Saxon Garden was entered into the national register of monuments in 1921 (Kłosek-Kozłowska 2017, 20), yet at the same time it found itself, as a result of comprehensive urban studies and development plans for the inner city drawn up in the 1920s, in the heart of the so-called “city” – its geometric centre was defined as the intersection of Marszałkowska Street and the Saxon Axis (Tomaszewski 1965, 96–97), which at that time did not exist. This was analogous to the situation of the Congress Kingdom period – the Garden again found itself at the centre of planned regulatory works, except that this time they conflicted with the Garden’s space and could not influence it favourably. Planners treated the streets surrounding the Garden primarily as elements of transport infrastructure, not as spaces with a social dimension.

In 1934 a competition was announced for the functional and transport design of Piłsudski Square. Concepts emerged to connect the square with Powiśle and to design bold solutions such as a tunnel under the entire Garden running from Żelaznej Bramy Square to Aleja na Skarpie, leading to a bridge over the Vistula (Architektura i Budownictwo 1935). The authors of this idea and winners of the first prize, Kazimierz Tołkoczko and Jan Kukulski, proposed what at first glance appeared drastic – a two-level metro station under Piłsudski Square and a tunnel under the Garden. However, the project did not interfere with the Garden’s space; it envisaged pedestrian traffic along the main park alley, which was to serve as a link between the areas adjoining the Garden from the east and west. In a way, the planners continued the urban thinking behind the Saxon Axis; this solution would also have made it possible to avoid routing Marszałkowska Street through the western part of the park (though it must be noted that these were only paper schemes – the implementation of such a technically advanced project could have critically affected the Garden’s space and ecosystem). The design was not executed, and in 1935 Marszałkowska Street was extended to Żelaznej Bramy Square, thereby severing the south-western part of the park with a motor traffic strip. In 1941, the German occupation authorities extended Marszałkowska further from Żelaznej Bramy Square to Bankowy Square, completely cutting off the western part of the Garden.

After the war, the space surrounding the Saxon Garden was further subordinated to transport arrangements (Fig. 4). The route of Marszałkowska Street was eventually adjusted to the surviving old tree stands in the western part of the Garden (Fig. 5), and from 1948 tram traffic ran along it. Before 1950 the damaged Garden fence was removed. A low concrete wall was built in its place, with gaps which seamlessly linked the Garden – now in fact a square – with the surrounding urban space. This is clearly visible at the en-

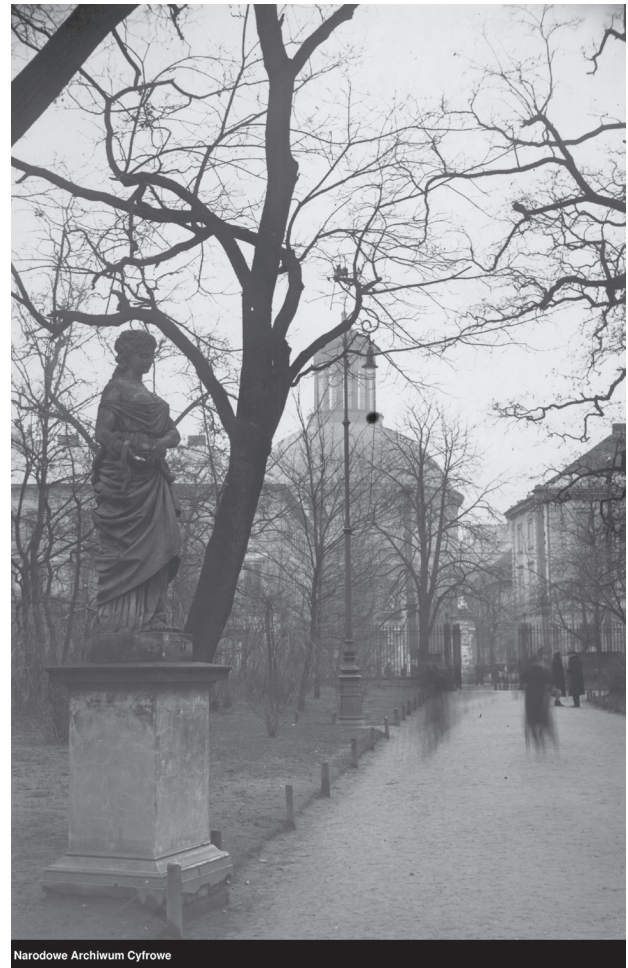


Fig. 3. Southern part of the Saxon Garden, view of the entrance from Królewska Street, 1926 (source: NAC, ref. 3/1/0/9/7361)

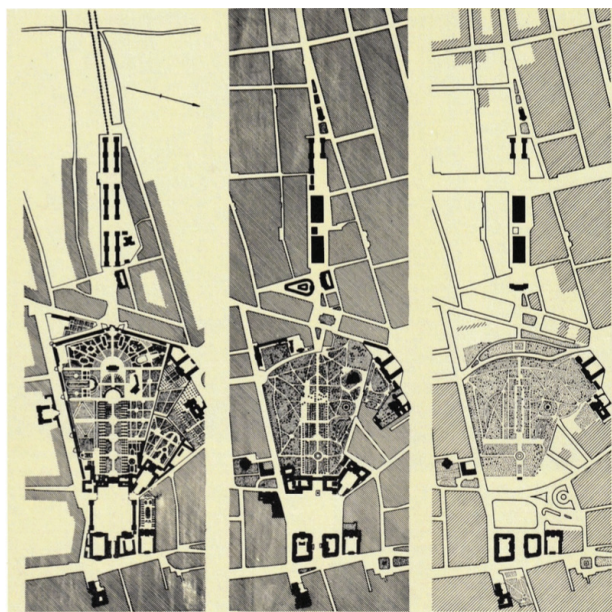
Il. 3. Południowa część Ogrodu Saskiego, widok na wejście od strony ulicy Królewskiej, 1926 (źródło: NAC, sygn. 3/1/0/9/7361)

trance from Królewska Street, which forms a clear connection between the green space and the pedestrian crossing.

War damage (including the demolition of the General Staff building) to some extent reopened the Saxon Garden to the city – the townhouses on Królewska Street and the Saxon Palace disappeared. The square became directly linked with the Garden. The former route connecting Wierzbowa Street with Ewangelicki Square, used in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by pedestrians and horse-drawn traffic, had already turned into an arterial road for cars in the interwar period (Fig. 6). In the 1980s this route consisted of two three-lane carriageways in each direction. In the late 1960s, in connection with the reconstruction of the Grand Theatre, a road interchange linking the areas of Teatralny and Victory (Zwycięstwa) Squares was created on the former Brühl Palace site, directly adjacent to the Garden (Fig. 7). The surface of Victory Square was used as a car park.

The urban composition of the Saxon Axis was entered into the national register of monuments in 1965. Subsequent design competitions for the regulation of this area in the 1970s and 1980s began to include proposals for rebuilding the Saxon and Brühl palaces (Kłosek-Kozłowska 2017, 17). However, planners’ attention focused on architecture and





Założenie tzw. Osi Saskiej wg XVIII-wiecznego projektu, stan przed 1939 r. i po odbudowie ze zniszczeń wojennych wg Wojciecha Kalinowskiego

Fig. 4. Saxon Garden – transformations of surrounding transport systems in three phases: 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, before 1939, after 1955  
(source: Kalinowski 1986, 554)

- II. 4. Ogród Saski – przemiany okolicznych układów komunikacyjnych w trzech fazach:  
2. poł. XVIII w., przed 1939 r., po 1955 r.  
(źródło: Kalinowski 1986, 554)

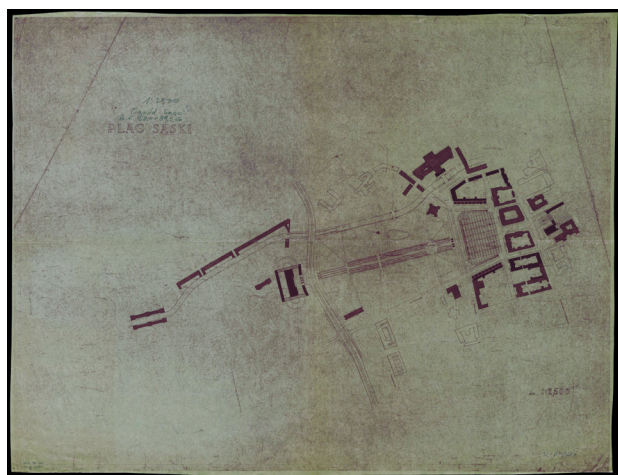


Fig. 5. Gerard Ciołek, site plan of the Saxon Garden with the extended Marszałkowska Street, after 1950  
(source: NID, „Teki Gerarda Ciołka” – TC.pl.6161)

- II. 5. Gerard Ciołek, Plan sytuacyjny Ogrodu Saskiego z przeprowadzoną ul. Marszałkowską, po 1950  
(źródło: NID, „Teki Gerarda Ciołka” – TC.pl.6161)

the immediate arrangements around it, with particular emphasis on the area of Piłsudski Square. No interventions in the Garden itself were envisaged. Nor was this space considered in terms of its links with other urban interiors of the former Saxon complex.



Fig. 6. Willem van de Poll, Saxon Square with a visible road in front of the Saxon Palace, 1934 (source: „Światowid” 1933, via: [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Warszawa\\_-\\_Plac\\_Saski\\_z\\_lotu\\_ptaka\\_\(1919\).jpg](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Warszawa_-_Plac_Saski_z_lotu_ptaka_(1919).jpg))

- II. 6. Willem van de Poll, Plac Saski z widoczną jezdnią przed pałacem Saskim, 1934 (źródło: „Światowid” 1933, za: [https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Warszawa\\_-\\_Plac\\_Saski\\_z\\_lotu\\_ptaka\\_\(1919\).jpg](https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Warszawa_-_Plac_Saski_z_lotu_ptaka_(1919).jpg))



Fig. 7. Aerial view of Victory Square with the then transport system, 1979 (source: NAC, ref. 53–1782)

- II. 7. Widok z lotu ptaka na plac Zwycięstwa wraz z ówczesnym układem komunikacyjnym, 1979 (źródło: NAC, sygn. 53–1782)

### *New Perspectives on Inner-City Spaces*

Towards the end of the twentieth century, planners' thinking about the space of the Saxon Garden began to change. In 1998, as part of the Local Spatial Development Plan for the Saxon Axis, a concept for the Garden's restoration was prepared by landscape architects Wojciech Trzópek and Marek Szeniański – alongside the reconstructed buildings of the Saxon Palace, Brühl Palace and the townhouses on Królewska Street, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century structure of the Saxon Garden as an enclosed space was to be restored. This can be linked to a turn in urban planning towards landscape-oriented design, which favours green infrastructure and the historical traditions of a given area. The concept referred to the formula of the garden as an element of an architectural and urban layout, closely linked to it and dependent on it.

This project is cited with regard to the Saxon Garden in a much later work, the 2016 diploma project by Krzysztof Moskała (Moskała 2016), supervised by Prof. Danuta Kłosek-Kozłowska and Dr. Ewa Pachowska. Its advantage is that it approaches the space of the Saxon Axis in a comprehensive manner – it does not limit itself to the three elements of the eastern part but also considers the interiors west of the Garden, such as Żelaznej Bramy Square. This clearly illustrates the shift in urban design towards creating connected public spaces understood as sequences of interiors within the city. It should be noted, however, that this approach does not characterise all proposals for this area. Other projects by planning offices produced in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, such as that of the FAAB studio (FAAB 2019), focused on the arrangement of Piłsudski Square itself, even introducing greenery there, but ignored the space of the Saxon Garden.

A new perspective on Warsaw's inner-city spaces was opened by the debate on the quality of public spaces, consolidated in Europe through the New Athens Charter and the practices of the New Urbanism, and gradually permeating into Polish urban planning, as shown by the 2006 Development Study for Warsaw and the most recent Spatial Constitution (*"Konstytucja przestrzenna"* 2024), prepared since 2018. The idea of restoring compact inner cities, creating high-quality public spaces and emphasizing the historical continuity of places has influenced a number of urban initiatives such as *"Nowe Centrum Warszawy"* (*"Nowe Centrum Warszawy"* 2024) – and although the project's plans do not include Piłsudski Square and the Saxon Garden themselves, they reveal a general approach: a striving to create smooth connections between individual greened urban interiors. In the context of the concept for the revitalisation of Żelaznej Bramy Square, a proposal emerged to restore the transport link between the square and the Saxon Garden in the form of a pedestrian crossing and a bicycle crossing running across this stretch of Marszałkowska Street (*"Plac Żelaznej Bramy"* 2024) (Fig. 8). The aim was to emphasise the historical layout of the Saxon Axis.

Following the Act adopted by the Polish Parliament in 2021 on the reconstruction of the Saxon Palace, Brühl Palace and three townhouses on Królewska Street in Warsaw, another architectural-urban design competition was announced. Once again, all attention focused on the architectural fabric and its future use. A very conservative position was taken with regard to the Saxon Garden – there are no specific proposals as to the nature of its use programme, nor is there any reflection on the role the Garden is to play in the urban space. The competition brief stated that its current shape should be respected – which is in fact at odds with the plans, since rebuilding the buildings listed in the competition would affect the park area. If they are to be erected there, a portion of the trees (approx. 150) will have to be removed, effectively destroying the dense mass of greenery that now provides a backdrop to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Press reports (TVN Warszawa 2022) indicate that some of the trees are to be transplanted to form rows framing Piłsudski Square on both sides (from Królewska and Wierzbowa Streets), but this requirement does not appear in the competition brief. The brief contains only individual suggestions, such as creating a pedestrian link with the



Fig. 8. Visualisation of the pedestrian link between Żelaznej Bramy Square and the Saxon Garden, MAU studio, 2021 (source: archives of the Office of Architecture and Spatial Planning of the City of Warsaw)

Il. 8. Wizualizacja połączenia pieszego pomiędzy placem Żelaznej Bramy a Ogrodem Saskim, pracownia MAU, 2021 (źródło: archiwum Biura Architektury i Planowania Przestrzennego m.st. Warszawy)

restored Beck Garden or opening the gastronomy complex onto the Saxon Garden, but these do not amount to a coherent overarching concept for the area. According to the competition guidelines, the Garden is to remain unfenced (SARP 2024).

Today the Saxon Garden has the character of a space that is a kind of hybrid between a historicising green enclave and a transitory inner-city square (Fig. 9). Well-maintained fragments coexist with worn-out elements. In the central part, the preserved wide, regular alley, a remnant of the Baroque garden, is flanked by carefully designed flower parterres and rows of well-kept statues – 19<sup>th</sup>-century copies of Baroque sculptures by Johann Georg Plersch – and flower beds. The surface of the alley is concrete, in places paved with slightly sunken stone slabs. The fountain on the main axis attracts onlookers, while small mobile kiosks offering snacks cluster around it. By contrast, severely degraded small architectural elements – rubbish bins covered in graffiti in the southern part or a peeling information board in the northern part – give an impression of neglect. On the northern side the Saxon Garden is neighboured by the empty Blue Palace, a primary school and an apartment house. To the east it opens onto the space of Piłsudski Square and, more recently, fenced-off excavations associated with the Saxon Palace reconstruction project. To the south it adjoins Królewska Street, used as a coach park. To the west, apart from the entrance from Marszałkowska Street, the view is of a six-lane carriageway of this arterial road and, in the further perspective, the architecture of Warsaw's inner centre.

On the other hand, as an inner-city public space the Saxon Garden is a place of high accessibility. Its greenery, due to the slow process of urban and social transformations acting upon this space, is very intuitively embedded in the city. Users feel at ease there – this is related to the fact that it is an inclusive, open, informal space, one that can be entered accidentally when moving from one point in Warsaw to another, while being green, friendly and characterised by a harmonious structure of alleys, thanks to its architectural





Fig. 9. View towards Warsaw's inner centre from the Saxon Garden, showing the interpenetration of the park zone with the inner-city space, 2023 (source: author's private archive)

Il. 9. Widok na ściśle centrum Warszawy z Ogrodu Saskiego, obrazujący przenikanie się strefy parku z przestrzenią śródmiejską, 2023 (źródło: archiwum prywatne autorki)

layout. The Garden's space is functional and serves local residents who walk their dogs there, spend time on the park lawns or engage in physical activities – from jogging and yoga to cycling (Fig. 10).

### *Conclusions and Proposals for the Future*

There were several reasons why the Saxon Garden transformed from a residential garden into an inner-city square. The first was the abandonment of the development of the Saxon Axis, which caused each of its components to evolve independently of the others. The Garden's location directly adjacent to the routes designed for the complex, combined with the abandonment of the complex's further development, had a destructive effect on the park. Public roads, especially in the western part, gradually became part of the street network of Warsaw's inner city and were used for increasingly large-scale transport projects – at the expense of the Garden's territory. The abandonment of the development of the east–west-oriented Saxon Axis, combined with the growth of the urban network, led to the eastern and western parts of the complex (originally two sections meant to form a unified whole) diverging in terms of building type, social structure and, finally, transport network. These areas ceased to form a whole, and their urban interiors gradually lost their mutual links – there was no coherent plan for them. As a result, the Saxon Garden, situated in the centre of



Fig. 10. Main alley of the Saxon Garden open to bicycle traffic, 2023 (source: author's private archive)

Il. 10. Główna aleja Ogrodu Saskiego dostępna dla komunikacji rowerowej, 2023 (źródło: archiwum prywatne autorki)

the former Axis, adapted to the surrounding areas in a spontaneous manner, depending on immediate needs, which in turn led to the degradation of its historic forms.

The transformation of the Garden into an inner-city square was also influenced by events of the partition period: conscious decisions by the Russian authorities to convert the Garden into a public park and to downgrade the former royal residence into a commercial tenement house. The policy of spatially linking the Garden with the rest of the city, pursued through much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, accustomed the inhabitants of Warsaw to the accessibility of this space and certainly, to some extent, trivialised it – although this is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. It represents a departure from the Garden's original residential function, but does not mean that such a space cannot have value for the city. The domination of the Saxon Garden by transport infrastructure was also partly a consequence of modernist thinking about the city, in which functionalism – understood as the number of connections and the privileging of motorised traffic – was highly important.

Above all, however, the Saxon Garden became an inner-city square because for a long time there was no concept for it, nor was any attempt made to subject it to a concrete plan. The few projects that addressed its space envisaged revitalisation in the context of the Saxon Palace reconstruction and treated the Garden as part of a square–palace–garden ensemble, which meant that reconstructing the architectural fabric was seen as a prerequisite for properly taking care of the Garden.

Inner-city parks originating from former residential gardens, such as Łazienki Królewskie in Warsaw, the Summer Garden in Saint Petersburg or the Tuileries in Paris, are complexes with a dominant historic edifice in their structure, usually converted into a museum, which means that the surrounding space is protected under different legal principles. These are usually enclosed gardens, closed after dusk and governed by internal rules of use (excluding bicycles, scooters or, for example, dogs). The Saxon Garden has not so far



been viewed as an autonomous unit deserving of a defined function and contemporary form, and above all a defined role within the urban space. The difficult space of Piłsudski Square, historically determined, which has effectively absorbed attention, has stood in the way. Many designers, experts and decision-makers have long been engaged in the struggle over the square, to which the Saxon Palace reconstruction project was eventually added. It is worth noting that neither Piłsudski Square nor the Saxon Garden has been covered by conceptual work within the framework of inner-city revitalisation under the “New Centre of Warsaw” project, despite the inclusion of three neighbouring squares: Teatralny, Bankowy and Żelaznej Bramy.

As a place of historical origin and an element of an outstanding urban composition, and – perhaps most importantly – as part of Warsaw’s representative areas that shapes the atmosphere of the capital’s inner city, the Saxon Garden should become the subject of a competition for revitalisation. Above all, this space should be considered in terms of its function and form within the entire network of urban interiors in this

part of Warsaw, and the role of the Saxon Garden in contemporary Warsaw should be defined. The focus should not be only on the Garden’s eastern side; its links with the urban space on the other sides should also be reconsidered. A plan is needed for connections to the north and south. Rather than uncompromising reconstruction, a combination of historical elements with modern solutions in small architecture and park infrastructure is advisable, in line with contemporary principles of public space restoration.

A good idea would be to zone the park and emphasise the different, historically accumulated functions of the areas on the eastern and western sides of the Garden – which, once an attractive urban interior has been created in the future at Żelaznej Bramy Square, could provide a coherent and natural link between these two places. Furthermore, once the winning project (whose implementation is currently uncertain) has been carried out, the Saxon Garden should be placed under active care, since the shape of this inner-city area directly affects the perception of Warsaw not only locally but also globally.

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### ***Streszczenie***

#### ***Od ogrodu rezydencjonalnego do śródmiejskiego skweru: przekształcenia przestrzeni Ogrodu Saskiego w Warszawie***

Duża część dzisiejszych europejskich parków śródmiejskich to dawne ogrody rezydencjonalne, włączane stopniowo w przestrzeń publiczną miast. Ogród Saski w Warszawie jest przykładem parku, który przeszedł inną ewolucję niż większość podobnych założeń – zamiast stać się przestrzenią zamkniętą przekształcił się w dostępny całą dobę śródmiejski skwer z licznymi trasami komunikacyjnymi. Jego położenie przy placu Piłsudskiego, miejscu o trudnej historii, sprawia, że Ogród pozostaje przestrzenią nie do końca przemyślaną, uwikłaną od początku w trwały stan napięcia przestrzennego i funkcjonalnego wynikającego z niestabilnej tkanki urbanistycznej otoczenia.

Artykuł opiera się na analizie źródeł archiwalnych i literatury przedmiotu oraz szczegółowej analizie porównawczej formy, układu i wyposażenia Ogrodu Saskiego oraz jego otoczenia, co pozwala uchwycić specyfikę jego rozwoju na tle przekształceń przestrzeni publicznych w europejskich centrach miast.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Ogród Saski, przestrzeń publiczna, zieleń, urbanistyka, park