



This walking tour of Centennial Hall and its environs was prepared by the 2008 participants of the international summer school Experiencing the New Europe. (See back inside cover for more information!).

To explore other neighborhoods in this fascinating city, look for the following companion self-guided tours also prepared by students from the United States and Poland:

City on the Islands: A Walking Tour through Ostrów Tumski and the Origins of Wrocław

The Path to Mutual Respect: A Path through the Quarter of Mutual Respect Showing the Journey from Tragedy through Reconciliation to Acceptance

The International Institute for the Study of Culture and Education (IISCE) at the University of Lower Silesia (DSW).

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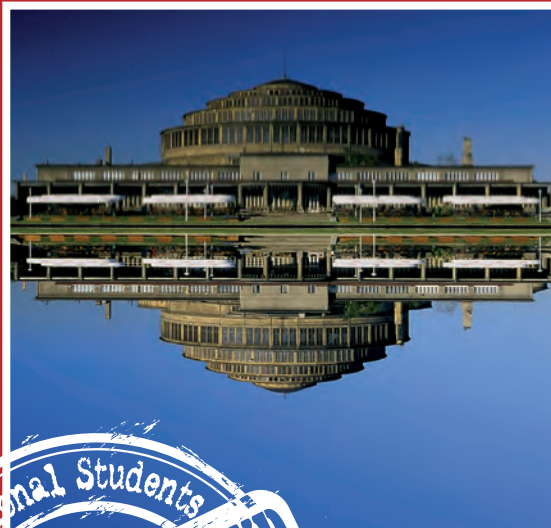
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University of Lower Silesia



Centennial Hall: A Path through Centennial Hall & the Heart of European Modernism



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Starting Point Pillars at Centennial Hall 1 Wystawowa Street

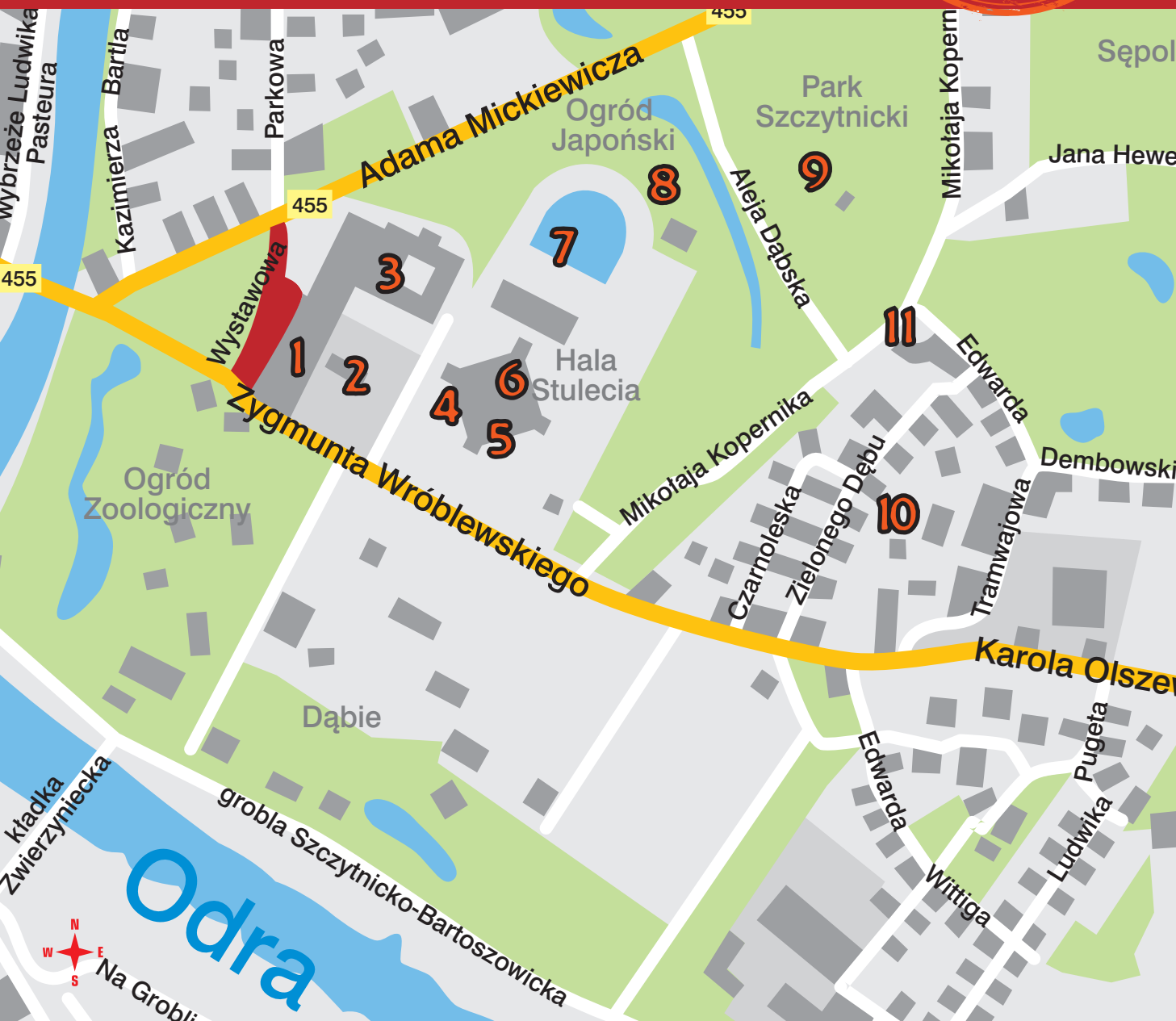


Pillars Our tour begins at the vine covered concrete pillars set in a colorful bed of flowers that welcome visitors from around the world to Centennial Hall and the surrounding exhibition grounds.

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Centennial Hall: A Path through Centennial Hall & the Heart of European Modernism is the first in a series of self-guided tours produced by students of an international summer school on European urban transformation, Experiencing the New Europe, organized by the International Institute for the Study of Culture and Education of the University of Lower Silesia in Wrocław in partnership with the State University of New York at Brockport. The objective of the summer school was to enable students to understand the underlying cultural, historic and social forces at play in the making of Central Europe by using the urban space of the city of Wrocław as a laboratory in which we investigated the past and its impact on the present dynamics of a 21st century Central European metropolis in transition. Students spent three weeks (July 12 – August 1, 2008) researching areas of the city that embody the complex and multi-layered identity of Wrocław (Centennial Hall and the Quarter of Mutual Respect). Methodologically, the project grows from the tradition of action research, which aims at implementing knowledge in practical social action. Therefore, the students, based on their interviews, site visits, observations, and exchange with academic experts, city officials, practitioners and regular inhabitants, all of whom are involved in reshaping the Centennial Hall – produced a guide whose goal is to introduce this unique city space to future visitors to Wrocław.

This guide is a part of the ongoing project of action research in urban spaces conducted by the International Institute for the Study of Culture and Education at the University of Lower Silesia.



Intro to Centennial Hall

Wrocław, the capital of the region of Lower Silesia, is a city of many names with each variation representing a unique period in the city's history. As the main meeting place for the city, Centennial Hall experienced similar changes. The Hall's initial construction in the early 20th century was done during the German period, when the city was known as Breslau.

Centennial Hall and the surrounding exhibition grounds are the creations of Max Berg and Hans Poelzig. Berg, Breslau's Municipal Architect, designed the Hall, with Poelzig sculpting the grounds of the surrounding area. Even after the inaugural exhibition, Berg continued to play a role in the further development of the exhibition grounds. But Centennial Hall itself maintained its original form and structure. Berg's revolutionary designs and use of reinforced concrete pushed the boundaries of modernist architecture, and even influenced the design and construction methods used in the development of the nearby modernist WUWA neighborhood 16 years later.

The city experienced another identity change in the aftermath of World War II. What was once Breslau became Wrocław, and Centennial Hall became People's Hall, reflecting the socialist ideology of the reborn Polish nation and city.

In 1948, People's Hall was the stage for the Recovered Territories Exhibition, a milestone in the young history of Polish Wrocław. With the rise of Democracy in 1989, the Hall continued to witness and play host to many significant events. Finally, with its induction to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 2006, Berg's monumental structure Recovered its original name – Centennial Hall.

This self guided tour aims to create a living history of a timeless masterpiece, connecting the fascinating past with the dynamic present and promising future.

Pillars



Pillars

Our tour begins at the vine covered concrete pillars set in a colorful bed of flowers that welcome visitors from around the world to Centennial Hall and the surrounding exhibition grounds. The flowers and Greek inspired pillars beautifully frame the view of Centennial Hall and Iglica. The original arched entrance to the 1913 Centennial Exhibition grounds, designed by Hans Poelzig, is no longer in existence. The columns are the remnants of the subsequent entrance designed by Max Berg in 1925, and once supported an elaborate wooden roof. This structure was inspired by Classical Greek architecture, but its construction was modernist in temper.

Iglica

Iglica



A monument erected in 1948, the needle-like Iglica was originally designed for the exhibition of the Reclaimed Territories. A symbol of Polish achievements after World War II, the Iglica became a beacon for new settlers to populate the city of Wrocław after it became a part of Polish territory following the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. The Iglica juxtaposed to Centennial Hall illustrates the dynamic Polish and German history shared by this area. The Hall was built to commemorate the effort to defeat Napoleon, while the Iglica was a display of Polish pride in the newly acquired territories. Standing at 100 meters high, Iglica was built with the intention of towering over Centennial Hall. The monument was designed by the Polish architect Stanisław Hempel. Iglica is comprised of 12 steel elements and weighs 44 tons. Iglica today remains an important local and national landmark.

Four Dome Pavilion



Photo by Adam Marzec

Four Dome Pavilion

The Four Dome Pavilion was designed by Hans Poelzig for the 1913 Centennial Exhibition, which presented visitors with a broad panorama of the history and culture of the Napoleonic era. Poelzig's influence for the four dome complex was Greek architecture, the dominant style during the Napoleonic period. But he added a modern twist to the classical styling using reinforced concrete, similar to Berg in his construction of Centennial Hall. The complex was designed with a courtyard in the center that contained a fountain with a statue of the Greek goddess Athena.

The four reliefs at the Pavilion's entrance are the work of renowned Polish sculptor Xawery Dunikowski put on display for the 1948 Recovered Territories Exhibition. After World War II, the Pavilion was used as a film studio and prior to 1989, every fourth film in Poland was produced there. The studio suffered a major blow during the flood of 1997. Waters rose to such heights that many of the studio's most notable and valuable sets and props were destroyed.



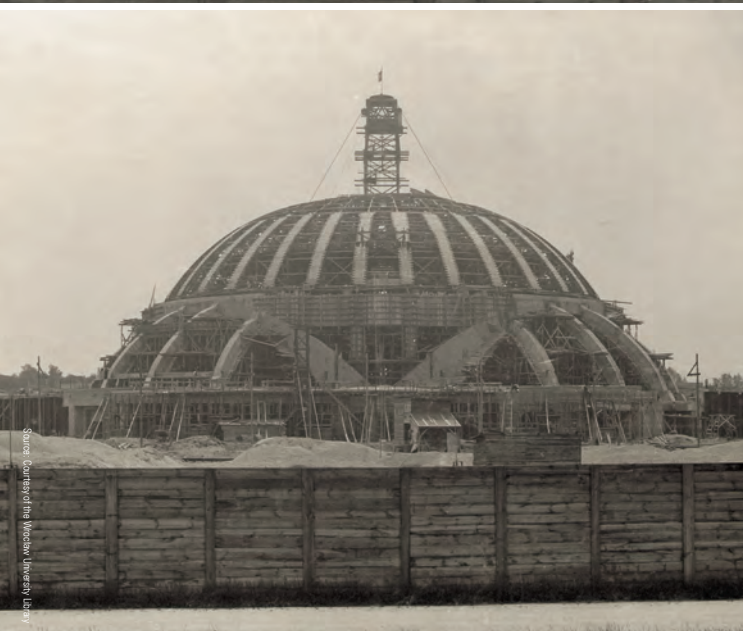
Photo by Adam Marzec

Centennial Hall – Background

Centennial Hall – Background



Source: Courtesy of the Wrocław University Library



Source: Courtesy of the Wrocław University Library

Built in 1913, Centennial Hall was erected to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Prussian Kaiser's call to arms to defeat Napoleon. Beyond the political and historical context, Max Berg set out to design a multifunctional cultural and exhibition space for an emerging metropolis. Innovative and radical at the time, Berg's project won the city-sponsored architectural competition to design the Hall. The monumental construction took less than two years to complete.

Max Berg's ambitions were mirrored in the construction process, which was completed one-and-a-half months before the deadline. Berg was influenced by the American style of organizing construction sites. A large centrally installed crane permitted 360 degree access to all sections of the Hall. Through its history the Hall has hosted world leaders, religious figures and artists who have participated in shaping the building's history.

Centennial Hall – Architecture

Centennial Hall – Architecture



While modern in design and the use of new building material, Berg was inspired by traditional architecture. Designed from the inside out for maximum impact under the monumental dome, Berg could achieve such a large span due to the application of reinforced concrete. The dome is one solid piece, with a 65 meter diameter, and stands 80 meters high. Berg's span exceeds both the Roman Pantheon (44m) and Hagia Sophia (31m). The flying buttresses supporting the base of the dome reflect the inspiration of the gothic style on Berg's design.

Modernist in spirit, the concrete structure allowed the building to be momentous without relying on ornament or decoration. With the dome supports visible, Berg took great care that the final textures of the concrete were aesthetically pleasing. The imprints of the wood used to mold the arches were left purposefully in the place of ornament. The dome sits on 32 ball bearings to allow for the swelling and contracting of the structure during variations of temperatures.

As other architects of the time, Berg was fascinated by glass structures. The vast number of windows in the Hall provided suitable lighting for diverse activities. The stepped pattern shape of the Hall's exterior along with window blinds permitted the adjustment of interior lighting conditions depending on the events being held at the Hall.

Centennial Hall – Social and Cultural Impacts



Centennial Hall – Social and Cultural Impacts

Berg wanted to create a space for mass audiences. His “theater in the round” was a manifestation of the Expressionist idea of “The Theater for Five Thousand” as well as the Bauhaus concept of “total theater.” Berg’s design helped push forward theater reform. With no set and backstage, actors were forced to interact with the audience, making them part of the performance, very similar to Ancient Greek theater. The Exhibition Hall was opened to the sounds of the “Symphony of a Thousand,” the work of Czech-born Austrian composer Joseph Mahler. The large space was deemed a highly appropriate setting where Mahler’s monumental piece could be performed properly. Berg, who was anxious to make this piece a great achievement, even had an organ built into the side of one of the walls. It was the largest organ of its time and featured more than 15,000 pipes.

The original restaurant pavilion adjacent to the Hall is still utilized today. Opening out to a fountain, this area is used also for opera performances. Berg’s original concept for Centennial Hall remains alive today. Added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 2006, the building continues to inspire visitors due to its revolutionary design.

Pergola



Photo by Statens and Staff of
Exhibition 1913, 2013



Photo by Adam Kowalski

Pergola

Hans Poelzig's Pergola is one of three permanent structures designed for the 1913 Centennial Exhibition. The Pergola consists of 750 concrete columns that form a 1500-meter long half-ellipse to the north side of Centennial Hall. While the original purpose of the Pergola was to enclose the Horticultural Exhibit, these garden displays were eventually moved to another area of the exhibition grounds.

Max Berg filled the inside of the Pergola with a large pond with a fountain, creating a relaxing and tranquil environment for visitors. Inspired by the traditional mountain spa town, Berg imagined it to be a place for city-dwellers to rest in their free time. After consulting with numerous experts, the space was filled with plant species typically found in health resort towns.



Photo by Adam Kowalski

Japanese Garden



Japanese Garden

The Japanese Garden was created by Fritz Von Hochberg in 1913 for the Garden Design Exhibit that featured a series of gardens from different historical periods and cultures. While much of the original garden fell into disrepair, all of the footpaths, ponds, and southern hilly parts with streams and vegetation have been rebuilt based upon the original design. The garden's features include a teahouse, designed to stage traditional tea ceremonies.

To warm the water for the aquatic plants unaccustomed to the harsh local climate, a boiler was installed beneath nearby Mickiewicz Street. As typical in Japanese Gardens, both a male (strong) and female (gentle) stream join in the center of the pond. Pumps were installed to control the flow of these streams. The garden is rich in plant varieties, with over 200 species of trees and shrubs, some of which are from the original exhibition.

The 1996 reconstruction of the Garden took place with the help of the Japanese government and experts from Nagoya. Unfortunately, in July 1997 this area was hit by a massive flood and the Garden remained under water for approximately three weeks, with many of the newly planted flora not surviving. Reopened in June 1998 to visitors, a sign on the bridge over the central pond marks the height of the water during the flood.

Saint John Niepomucen Church



Saint John Niepomucen Church

The small timber Saint John Niepomucen Church was a feature of the historic section of the Cemetery Art Exhibition that took place in 1913. Built originally in the 16th Century in the small Upper Silesian town of Stare Koźle, the church was slated for demolition. The relocation and reassembling of the church in Szczytnicki Park was done to demonstrate point that deteriorating architectural monuments could and should be saved, restored and preserved for future generations. While other objects on display during the Cemetery Art Exhibition are long gone, the historic church remains and is a permanent fixture in the wooded surroundings of the park.

WUWA Neighborhood



WUWA Neighborhood

WUWA is one of eight model modernist housing neighborhoods in Europe. Created by the Silesian Section of the Werkbund for the 1929 Wohnung und Werkraum Ausstellung, or Living and Workspace Exhibition organized in Centennial Hall, the 32 buildings were constructed in just three and a half months. WUWA was meant to serve as an example of how European cities could use new building materials to deal with the immense urban housing shortages that arose following WWI.

WUWA contains single family houses, terrace homes and multiple family dwellings. Built adhering to modernist principles, the housing in the WUWA neighborhood placed an emphasis on innovative usage of space and access to natural light, while it de-emphasized traditional concepts of ornamentation. The emphasis on organic architecture and access to nature are clearly evident in the large picture windows and the rooftop gardens visible throughout the neighborhood.

WUWA was originally meant to be an architectural competition open to international architects. However, city officials funding the initiative decided that the unique climate of the city required that only Lower Silesian architects be allowed to design the buildings. While the architects did have the knowledge necessary to create buildings that could withstand the city's hot summers, rainy springs and falls, and cold harsh winters, the quality of the WUWA neighborhood suffered due to the haste in which it was built. The fact that doors and windows were improperly installed, and that plaster cracked after only a few years, initially led to criticism of the housing in the area. Today the WUWA neighborhood is recognized as a monument to modernist architecture.



The Park Hotel



The Park Hotel

One of the most revolutionary buildings in the WUWA neighborhood is known today as the Park Hotel. Designed by Hans Scharoun, the Park Hotel was originally built as temporary housing for singles and newlywed couples. The former occupied the building's left wing, while the latter were offered slightly larger living spaces in the hotel's right wing. Each apartment had a small kitchenette, living room, bathroom, and bedroom. The open lobby and public dining spaces adjoining the two wings encouraged social interaction and a sense of community.

Similarly, all residents had access to the rooftop garden, which was an important element of the building's modernist organic design that sought to offer inhabitants proximity to nature. Another important feature that emphasized the building's modernist roots was the lack of external decorations. A curved colored pipe is the sole decorative element that adorns the awning of the Hotel's back patio.

The exterior of the Park Hotel was designed to appear like a cruise ship at sail with a blue-grey strip of paint along the bottom giving the allusion that the building was floating amongst the landscape. Horizontal windows accentuated the building's nautical appearance, while the Hotel's orientation along the east-west axis maximized natural lighting of the interior spaces.

For the Motivated Tourist

For the Motivated Tourist



The ZOO



Photo by Jurek D. Górecki



Photo by Jurek D. Górecki

The ZOO

The City Zoological Garden in Wrocław was originally established in 1865, making it the oldest zoo in today's Poland. When Centennial Hall was built and opened in 1913, there was an initiative to expand the exhibition grounds to include the zoo, but eventually that idea was abandoned.

Like most institutions in Wrocław, the zoo has a troubled history. In 1921, following the economic crisis in Germany, it was forced to shut down. The zoo was reopened in 1927 and enjoyed a healthy period of growth, however the events of WWII destroyed much of the zoo, and many of the animals were killed or lost. During the Recovered Territories Exhibition of 1948, the grounds were used to house temporary displays, including the stands of not only state-owned companies, but also privately-owned entities as well.

The zoo was reopened that same year thanks to the efforts of the University of Wrocław. Great support for the zoo among local citizenry ensured that the garden quickly grew in stature. By the end of the 1950s, it had expanded to its current size.

Sepolno



Photo by Shutterstock/Mark

Sepolno

The main idea of the architects who designed and built Sepolno, was to create a modern garden housing estate for the middle and lower classes. It was built during the interwar period and accommodated both individuals and families. Construction of the first buildings ended in 1919; the whole estate was completed in 1935. The public park in the center of Sepolno is flanked by a large brick school on one side and a church on the other side. Shops and various businesses were conveniently positioned in the center of the estate making them easily accessible for local residents.

Between May of 1944 and August of 1945, the school housed a forced labor camp for women and children. The church, built in modernist style, was erected in 1933. The church's original bell tower was partially destroyed during the war; it's look was slightly changed when reconstructed during the communist period. The building held a cinema in the post-war years, but was reverted back to its original function in 1999.

As a major town-planning initiative, Sepolno was designed to be engulfed in greenery. Not only is the neighborhood surrounded by parks, but all residents had access to their own small garden plots situated to the front and back of apartment blocks. Similar to Wrocław's WUWA neighborhood, Sepolno represents a functionalist approach to the interwar housing problems facing the city.

Olympic Stadium



Another highlight of Sepolno is the Olympic Stadium built between 1926 and 1928, and then expanded in 1935-1939. Despite its current name, it was never used for the International Olympic Games. In 1930, the stadium played host to the so-called "German Olympic Games," a preparatory event for the German contingent competing in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

Following the rise of Nazism, the stadium was renamed the Herman Goering Stadium. Many swastikas decorated the stadium walls; today, only the plaques they were mounted on remain visible. The area now belongs to the University of Physical Education with the stadium being used for speedway racing and soccer matches.



Szczytnicki Park & Max Berg's Home

Szczytnicki Park & Max Berg's Home

Szczytnicki Park was created in the 1850s. It is this the largest park in Wrocław and one of the oldest municipal parks in Europe. The former home of Max Berg is also situated in the park. Built in 1910, the house was not designed by Berg. However, the architect did such extensive remodelling that the house is often referred to as Berg's creation. The house is now privately owned.



Photo by: Jacek D. Górcan



Photo by: Adam Murawski



Photo by: Adam Murawski

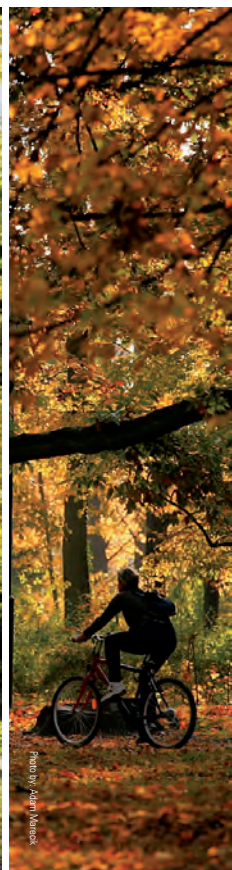
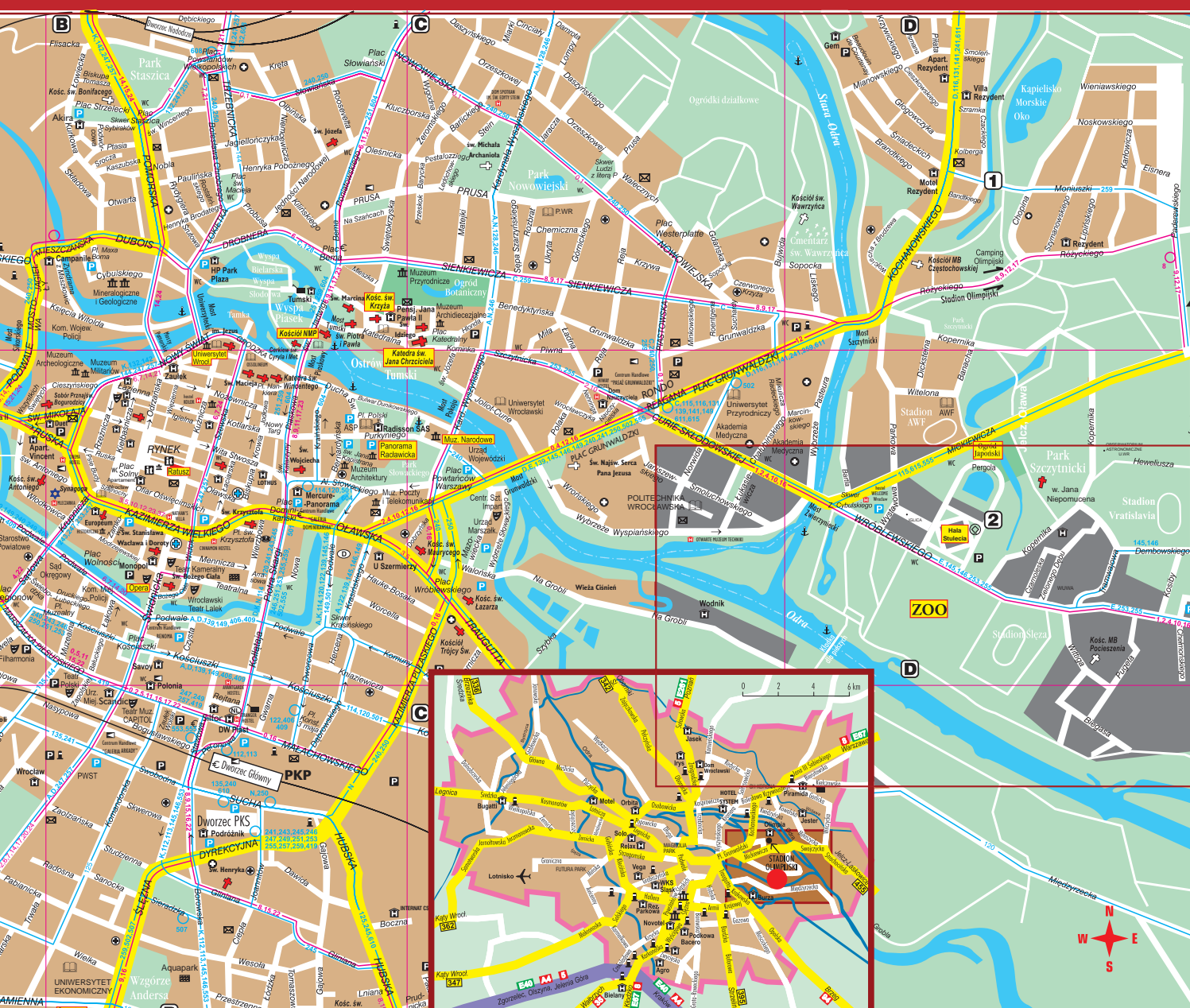


Photo by: Adam Murawski

Map of Wrocław

Map of Wrocław





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Wrocław

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