

Sailing on the Odra river

Since the olden days, goods were floated down the Odra river from the moment when the first dugout was set afloat, which happened at least 5000 years ago. It was not until later that the land routes appeared; however, they also ran along the rivers, like one of the branches of the famous Amber Road leading from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean ran along the Odra river. The routes leading from West to East appeared later, but this route passed through the region of the present Koźle as well.

The intersection of the main trade routes had to result in the creation of a rich city. The trading income of the inhabitants was to increase even more when the Kłodnica Canal, connecting the harbor situated at the Odra river near Koźle and a rapidly developing Upper Silesian industrial region, was opened at the beginning of the 19th century.

The idea of building a canal arose in 1788. A year later, the first project of the canal, known as the Kłodnica Canal, was developed. Barges were used to transport raw materials, such as coal and wood, as well as the products of the Upper Silesian metallurgical industry, to Germany. The barges with the displacement of 500 tones, towed by horses or oxen and sometimes supported with sails, sailed through the Kłodnica Canal.

The constant development of the infrastructure and the fleet resulted in the harbor in Koźle becoming the largest inland harbor in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century. The volume of the cargo transported via barges was so immense that during the 1930s, it became necessary to consider building a new, wider canal adjusted to handling larger and newer barges. Not wanting to cease the transport of coal to Germany even for a moment, it was decided in September 1933 that a completely new canal of almost identical flow would be built. Such was the origin of the Gliwice Canal, also known as the Upper Silesian Canal, and, during the years of World War II, as the Adolf Hitler Canal.

The first works began in 1935, whereas the formal commissioning of the new water route took place on 8 December 1939. The new canal was significantly wider and equipped with massive modern locks enabling the barges with the displacement of up to 1000 tones to sail through. Its length is 40.6 km, and its maximum depth is 3.5 meters.

The intense exploitation of the Odra water route ended with the fall of the Polish People's Republic (PRL). In the new capitalist reality, the underfunded Odra infrastructure lost to road transport.