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## History of the Prussian tuberculosis sanatorium movement, 1863-1934 : the brief history of the “Prussian tuberculosis sanatorium movement” in today Western Polish landscapes and its first site in Sokołowsko, the Lower Silesia

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## History of the Prussian tuberculosis sanatorium movement, 1863-1934.

The brief history of the “Prussian tuberculosis sanatorium movement” in today Western Polish landscapes and its first site in Sokołowsko, the Lower Silesia

Historia pruskich sanatoriów przeciwgruźliczych 1863-1934.  
Zarys dziejów „ruchu pruskich sanatoriów przeciwgruźliczych”  
na Ziemiach Odzyskanych i pierwszego sanatorium w Sokołowsku  
na Dolnym Śląsku

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**Streszczenie:** Powstawanie sanatoriów przeciwgruźliczych w Prusach było zasługą młodego lekarza, dr. Hermanna Brehmera. Założył sanatorium w położonej w Kotlinie Sokołowskiej wiosce Sokołowsko, w którym realizował własny program „higieniczno-dietetyczny”. Uważał, że przyczyną gruźlicy jest małe serce przy dużych płucach, a nie niedożywienie i niehigieniczne i pozbawione dopływu świeżego powietrza mieszkania. Do wyzdrowienia konieczne było zatem zachowanie odpowiedniej diety i pobyt w odpowiednich warunkach klimatycznych, tam gdzie gruźlica nie występowała. W ostatniej ćwierci dziewiętnastego wieku w Imperium Niemieckim wprowadzono ubezpieczenia emerytalne i na wypadek inwalidztwa. Pruskie towarzystwa ubezpieczeń od inwalidztwa organizowały zakłady leczenia gruźlików, aby ograniczyć szerzenie się choroby. Dlatego na obecnych Ziemiach Zachodnich Polski wznoszono gmachy sanatoriów oferujących leczenie według programu higieniczno-dietetycznego Brehmera. Postęp medycyny sprawił, że ruch sanatoryjny zamarł, a budynki sanatoriów zyskały nowe przeznaczenie. Dalsze losy gmachów dawnych pruskich sanatoriów przeciwgruźliczych stanowią ciekawy problem badawczy, ponieważ znajdują się w miejscowościach uzdrowskich i w niektórych z nich nadal leczą się tradycyjnymi metodami gruźlicę i choroby płuc.

**Abstract:** The history of the „Heilstätte“ (tuberculosis sanatoria) in Prussia begins with the young physician Dr. Hermann Brehmer. He established a sanatorium in the Silesian mountain village of Sokolowsko in which he developed his “hygienic-dietetic” program. Brehmer believed that the causes of tuberculosis were a small heart and large lungs and not just malnutrition and badly ventilated and unhygienic flats. Only suitable dietary treatment in an area with good climatic conditions with no history of tuberculosis could aid recovery.

Regional retirement and disability insurance was founded in the German Empire in the last quarter of 19th century. The Prussian disability insurance companies provide facilities for the treatment of

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tuberculosis patients in order to prevent the spread of the disease wherever possible. Because of this, the construction of sanatoria offering Brehmers hygienic-dietetic program became a trend, the number of sanatoria in today Western Poland regions increased. Medical progress brought an end to the sanatorium movement and led to a change in the use of the facilities. Because the sites were still known as "Heilstätte" and many of them still used traditional practices, the question of the later fate of these institutions required detailed examination. Some of the former Prussian sanatoria in Western Poland are still today, in part, specialized institutions for the treatment of tuberculosis and lung diseases.

**Słowa kluczowe:** gruźlica, sanatoria, Prusy, Ziemie Odzyskane, terapia higieniczno-dietetyczna, ubezpieczenie od inwalidztwa, Oborniki, Torzym, Sokołowsko

**Keywords:** tuberculosis, sanatoriums, Prussia, Western Poland, hygienic-dietetic therapy, disability insurance, Oborniki, Torzym, Sokołowsko

Sokołowsko (The German name in 1854 was Görbersdorf) is located in the Wałbrzych highlands, a shallow ridge which connects Karkonosze with the Góry Orlickie. Until 1945 the village belonged to the Prussian province of Lower Silesia. The village is today located a few kilometers away from the border with the Czech Republic in a very quiet and sequestered valley<sup>2</sup>.

The valley of Sokołowsko extends in a "tuberculosis free height" of "1720 foot" (about 520 meters). As a old travel guidebook described the valley it expands rather in length than width; but once the approximately 3000 feet high mountains came to surround the valley, they were not that close to each other, to give the visitor a sense of anxiety. The young physician Dr. Brehmer, who himself was originally from Silesia, was looking for a place, where tuberculosis did not appear and where also ideal spa conditions were given. He wanted to open the first Prussian tuberculosis sanatorium in that place. The planned treatment program included elements such as exercises, with the possibility of slow walks in the park and onto the hills around Sokołowsko. But there were also plenty of benches to rest (according to the "Terrainkur by Oertel"). A second focus in Brehmers treatment concept was the "balance of the health to the sick". The nutritional therapy consisted of frequent meals. The milk was mixed with brandy and portions of wine should help patients with fever. A third element of the treatment was based on the idea of resilience: sleeping with open windows, cold rubbings and showers as well as a so-called hydropathic treatment<sup>3</sup>.

In 1854 Brehmer bought a small house used as an water-cure establishment from his sister in law, which she ran unsuccessfully. There he starts with the treatment of four tuberculosis patients. Three years later, in 1857, Brehmer was mediated by Alexander von Humboldt, the member of the Prussian State Council to get a official concession for a medical facility for tuberculosis. Beginning in 1862 Brehmer started to proceed with the first tuberculosis sanatorium building (today the ruined building

<sup>2</sup> A. Jüttemann, *150 Jahre Lungenheilstätte Görbersdorf*, „Pneumologie“, 2014, 68, 481-487.

<sup>3</sup> H. K. Busch, *Die Görbersdorfer Heilanstalt des Dr. H. Brehmer. Eine Klinik für chronisch Lungenkranke*, Berlin: Enslin 1875.



„Liegehalle“ (fresh air therapy room)  
in Bydgoszcz tuberculosis sanatorium



The tuberculosis sanatorium in Torzym

is called “Zamek”, in German it was called “Altes Kurhaus”) for 40 patients, accommodated in single rooms. The exact opening date of this first tuberculosis sanatorium Prussia (and presumably also in Europe) is controversial<sup>4</sup>.

The Institute was located on the slopes of the “Storchberg”. The terrain has made it possible to expand the facility easily. The second part of the building, an additional section of the first one (called “New Kurhaus”) was opened in 1878. Both houses had 110 rooms. There have also been three villas built in the park: the “White House” with 20 rooms, the “New House” built in 1873 with 15-18 rooms, and – for special guests – the “Villa Rosa”, today “Pension Róża”, with 16 rooms. There were also farm buildings with stables, which were a bit further away from the main building, and on the southern slope of the 300-acre park institution, a chemical laboratory<sup>5</sup>.

The “White House” was the first building of the institution in which – since 1854 – lung patients were treated. After 1873 the building became the apartment and consulting room of the medical assistant Peter Dettweiler. He was the founder of the “Liegekur” and later head of his own sanatorium next to Frankfurt/Main. After 1872 the “Altes Kurhaus” got extended according to plans of the Hanoverian architect Opler. The style can be acknowledged as “Gothic Revival”. In the north wing of the new facility was an inhalatorium for treatment with saline and a shower room for the hydrotherapy in the winter months. In the summer, the patients were showered outdoors. Between both of the main buildings a winter garden and a reading room could be found in a supplementary building. The “Villa Rosa” and the “New House” were built due to financial help of patients, some of which even lived with their families in Sokolowsko during the time of their treatment. In 1869 a chief physician villa was built

<sup>4</sup> S. Hähner-Rombach, *Sozialgeschichte der Tuberkulose*, Stuttgart 2000; I. Langerbeins, *Lungenheilstätten in Deutschland 1854-1945*, Dissertation Frankfurt /M 1979.

<sup>5</sup> E. von Leyden, E., *Fest-Rede zur Feier des fünfzigjährigen Bestehens von Dr. Brehmers Heilstätten für Lungenkranke in Görbersdorf i. Schlesien*. Wiesbaden: Bergmann 1904.

for Brehmer. There were even plans for expansion up to 300 beds. This project was never realized<sup>6</sup>.

There was also a “people sanatorium department” for 100 financially underprivileged patients in Sokołowsko, who were previously scattered in private houses placed over the village. In the years 1925 to 1929, the sanatorium got reconstructed to carry out the then new surgical treatments. An operating room for aseptic lung surgeries, an inhalation and radiotherapy room were established. For diagnosis there was an X-ray device and a chemically-bacteriological laboratory available. The “Liegekur” was now a part of the therapy, so “Liegehallen” were built. Brehmers treatment methods were mainly a result of his study from 1855 of the “physiological effect of the change in air pressure”. He gathered that lower air pressure in the mountains has healing effects on tuberculosis and therefore the inhabitants of the mountain regions were not suffering from this illness. Although Brehmer has had first cures in Sokołowsko, most colleagues initially ignored his work.

*Diejenigen, welche Notiz von ihm nahmen, unterstützten ihn aber nicht in seinen Bestrebungen, sondern theils verlachten und verspotteten sie ihn, theils [...] stempelten seine Versuche, die Schwindsucht zu heilen, mit dem Stempel der Scharlatanerie; ja sehr fehlte [es] sogar nicht an Leuten, die ihm feindlich entgegentraten, und es ihm in jeder Weise erschwerten, eine Heilanstalt, ein Asyl für Lungenkranke errichten zu können<sup>7</sup>.*

Brehmer, however, has found a big supporter in Berlin: Alexander von Humboldt. Humboldt was so impressed by Brehmers ideas, that he convinced the prominent physician Johann Schönlein to the idea of supporting the construction of the sanatorium in Sokołowsko, against the resistance of the concession-administration. First, only a few Tuberculous came to Sokołowsko. But when practicing physicians began after 1859 to send lung patients regularly to Sokołowsko and the first tuberculosis patients came back cured (or at least in much better condition) to him, other doctors became aware of the new sanatorium. Steadily from that point, the number of those tuberculosis sanatoriums patients increased:

1860	1862	1869	1870	1872	1873
60	104	318	347	400	706

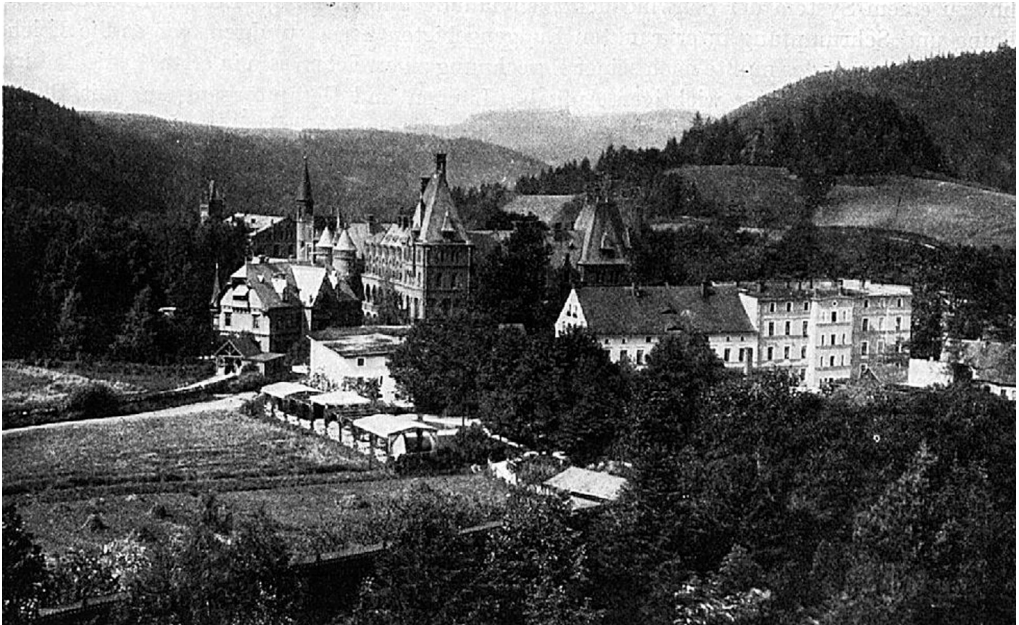
Numbers of patients in Brehmers “Heilstätte”<sup>8</sup>

According to the report of the Busch, the cure was designed as follows: After two days of stay, where the new arrivals recovered from the rigors of travel, Dr. Brehmer performed the first screening. The second screening was carried out after one week. For those there were three junior doctors available.

<sup>6</sup> H. K. Busch, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.



The first tuberculosis sanatorium of Dr. Brehmer in Sokolowsko, built 1863

In the following weeks the patients received behavioral statements that related the length and place of their outdoor stay (sunny or shady places), and secondly, the mode of movement (length of walks and incline level of the paths).

The sporty side of the treatment Brehmer calls “methodical mountaineering”. While efforts are made, “the lame lungs, especially the upper part” starts to activate. He said, it is “medically prescribed, taking a deep breath systematic”. Busch calls this practice a “gymnastics of sick chest”. Climbing the hills around Sokolowsko is to do in slow speed, to avoid increasing the heart and respiratory rate too much. For therapeutic walks the institution’s park was used, which extends to a height of about 790 meters over sealevel. Benches for the patients have been placed at least every 50 steps<sup>9</sup>.

Another therapy component were cold baths with a water temperature of six to eight degrees Celsius. There were called “rain baths” (a kind of cold shower). There was a special shower pavilion intended for this use in summer time. In the winter, the therapy was performed in a heated room in the main building:

*Diese Bäder, welche vorzugsweise zur Anregung der Hautthätigkeit und zugleich zur Abhärtung des verweichlichten Körpers sowie zur Resorption der betreffenden Exsudate dienen, [und den Patienten] widerstandsfähiger gegen Witterungseinflüsse [...] machen, wurden zuerst von Herrn Dr. Brehmer bei Lungenkranken angewendet, und sollen in gar vielen Fällen wirklich Wunderdinge [bewirken]<sup>10</sup>.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

Immediately, after the five to 45 seconds continuous rain or shower rooms, the skin was “warm rubbed” by a lifeguard.

The doctors spend the whole day in the sanatorium to be addressed with questions or problems. There were also fixed office hours twice a day for the consultation of residents. Dr. Sokolowski had been hired for the many Polish patients (After becoming Polish in 1945, the village Görbersdorf got its present Polish name from one of these medical assistants: Dr. Sokółowski)<sup>11</sup>.

The treatment program in Brehmer’s sanatorium consists of the following methodological components:

- diet (“functional food”);
- education on proper nutrition and lifestyle;
- additional vitalizing of the skin activities to support “weak” lungs;
- loss of blood circulation through the permanently reduced air pressure in the mountains;
- stay in the fresh mountain air;
- exercise in the fresh air, alternating with rest;
- rain showers, cold and warm rubbings;
- constant monitoring by doctors and nurses to ensure compliance with the methods;
- in rare cases, addition of drug therapy: morphine, chloral, pepsin, red wine, pulvis Doweri, opium and tannins, in affections of the larynx morphine, envelopes, croton and inhalation of hot steam. Against bleeding: ergot internally and subcutaneously in high doses, ice and morphine; also evaporations of oil, pumil; carbolic acid internally and externally, ozone water<sup>12</sup>.

There was a sofa and a mahogany or oak desk in each room. In the main building even an elevator was in the 19th century available. Maids and butlers served the patients and cleaned the rooms. The main building had two large dining rooms, each with six long tables (for each table a waiter was assigned), a men’s and a women’s room with upholstered furniture for rest before and after meals, as well as for the completion of paperwork. There was also a large veranda with a glass roof, which faced south. **There, those patients who couldn’t visit the park or institution were resting during the day**<sup>13</sup>.

Above the “Villa Rosa” rose the “Humboldt temple” which was built in 1869 in honor of Alexander von Humboldt in gratitude for his contributions to the development of the sanatorium. The temple with the bust of Humboldt no longer exists. Since 2012, on the foundations of the former temple stands an artwork, designed by the Polish

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<sup>11</sup> A. Averbeck, *Von der Kaltwasserkur bis zur physikalischen Therapie: Betrachtungen zu Personen und zur Zeit der wichtigsten Entwicklungen im 19. Jahrhundert*, Norderstedt: BoD 2012, p. 451; H. K. Busch, *op. cit.*

<sup>12</sup> O. Welten, *Die Heilanstalten von Görbersdorf. Was sie versprechen und was sie halten. Für Aerzte und Kranke auf Grund eigener Anschauung und authentischer Quellen dargestellt von Dr. Oskar Welten*. Berlin: Issleib 1888.

<sup>13</sup> H. K. Busch, *op. cit.*

artist Zbigniew Warpechowski. His artwork is named “Łódź Postępu” and it’s built in the form of a ship.

The patients in the 19th century had to pay for food and lodging 36-51 Mark per week and in wintertime (including heating) 42-57 Mark; own sheets could be brought. Medical services and additional cure methods (e.g. red wine) were not included.

In the 1950s, a part of the sanatorium was demolished. The new Polish chief physician transformed the sanatorium in a specialized clinic for respiratory illnesses called “Grunwald”. In December 1966, the institution had to be closed, after the local government decided to promote the region as a winter sports resort. It was feared, that the presence of a tuberculosis clinic could interfere with potential tourists<sup>14</sup>.

In 2005, a fire destroyed much of the remaining, but already worn down by decay and vandalism main building. The house is currently a ruin in very bad condition. The “Villa Rosa”, however, was recently restored. The “White House” and the “New House” are inhabited, but in need of renovation. The Warsaw Cultural Foundation „In Situ”, which has purchased the entire six-acre site in 2008, wants to rebuild the former main building and make it available for cultural purposes. The construction started in 2012. On the grounds of the eroded in the 1950s component of the main building a new building is planned, although the reconstruction progress slows because of sparse flowing donations. Nevertheless, the foundation is already proposing cultural projects on the site (film festivals, workshops and exhibitions).

### **The tuberculosis movement in Prussia**

Thirty years after Brehmer opens the first tuberculosis sanatorium in Sokołowsko, the first health, social and disability insurances were implemented in Prussia. The state insurance institution (each Prussian province had their own insurance institution) built own tuberculosis sanatoriums for patients from the working class in whole Prussia. A lot of the historic sanatorium buildings still exists in today's Western Polish woiwodships, f.e. in Bydgoszcz, Olsztyn and Olsztynek (Warmia-Mazury) and in the Karkonosze area (Szklarska Poreba, Kowary and Kamienna Góra).

I want to describe two significant examples of those tuberculosis sanatoriums built during the Prussian tuberculosis movement: The sanatorium of Oborniki (near to Poznań) and the sanatorium of Torzym (half way between Poznań and Berlin).

#### **Oborniki**

The disability insurance institution of the Prussian province Posen began in 1901 with construction plans of the “Prince Wilhelm” sanatorium for tuberculosis for 100 male patients in Oborniki. Into making the hospital project drafts of the Oborniki site two well-known architects Schmieden and Boethke (and the local architect Georg Zillmann, who had already been involved in the construction of hospital buildings in the

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<sup>14</sup> A. Awerbeck, *op. cit.*



province) were engaged<sup>15</sup>. The sanatorium in Oborniki was opened in 1903. The park surrounding the institution consisted mainly of pine forest. The clinic has been established in the so-called "pavilion style"<sup>16</sup>.

The pavilions were meant to awake a "family-like association", which would add to the well-being of the patients.

In addition, an administrative and a commercial building, as well as the chief's physician villa and a gatehouse were built. In each pavilion 34 patients could be accommodated. On the ground floor of the administration building, which was also referred to as the „main building”, the medical examination rooms were integrated. The dining room was laid out on two levels: One floor was for the sick, the other for the staff. In addition a laundry and a disinfection system were placed on that area. After World War I the institution became the property of the Polish State insurance (the province of Posen was awarded the Treaty of Versailles in large part to the new Polish state) and was renamed „Lecznica dla płucno-chorych pod Obornikami”. The Warsaw Social Insurance Agency took the house over in 1938. Later, the Pension Fund of Polish railways took the building of the former sanatorium over and changed in 1974 the site into a cardiac rehabilitation clinic („Szpital Rehabilitacyjno-Kardiologiczny Kowanówko”)<sup>17</sup>.

### Torzym

The so-called "Heimstätte" of the city of Schöneberg (today a quarter of Berlin) was located about two kilometers northwest of the town of Torzym (today Lubuskie voivodeship). The house was opened by a private caritative sanatorium society in July 1907. Responsible for the construction was the Schöneberg medical officer Dr. John Rabnow. About 700 meters from the railway line between Berlin and Warsaw, located at an altitude of 130 meters above sea level, he found in a wooded area a property building ideal for the sanatorium purposes. The female patients from Berlin were later picked up from the train station of Torzym by horse and cart (later by car)<sup>18</sup>.

A second medical pavilion was completed in May 1909. At the request of the city Schöneberg the second pavilion was to be opened for male patients.

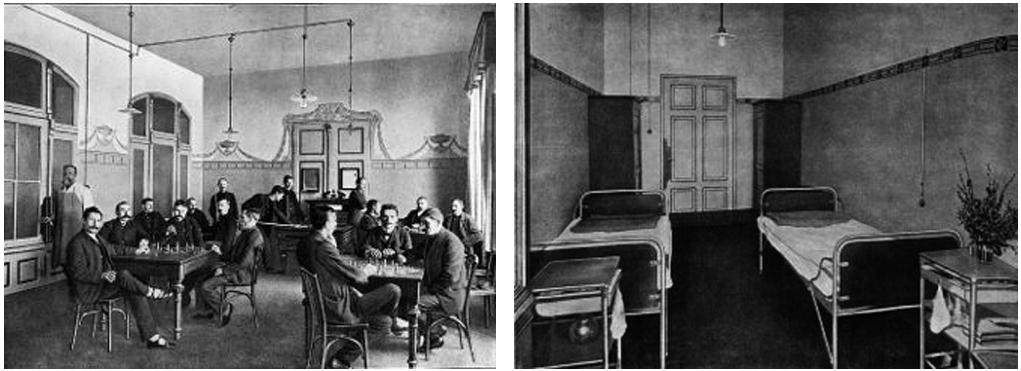
At the end of 1911, the sanatorium reached its greatest expansion: 74 female and 28 male patients lived in the Torzym house. 1911 the city of Schöneberg became the

<sup>15</sup> A. Paradowska, *Przeciw chorobie. Architektura szpitalna Wielkopolski w dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym*. Dissertation UAM Poznań 2013.

<sup>16</sup> V. von Weltzien, *Verschiedene Heil- und Pflegeanstalten, Versorgungs-, Pflege- und Zufluchtshäuser*. In: *Entwerfen, Anlage und Einrichtung der Gebäude. Lungenheilstätten* In: Durm, Josef, Ende, Hermann und Schmitt, Eduard (Hrsg.): *Handbuch der Architektur*. Vierter Teil. 3. Halb-Band. 2. Heft. Stuttgart: Arnold Bergsträsser Verlagsbuchhandlung A. Kröner 1903.

<sup>17</sup> J. Szuman, *Zakłady lecznicze w Kowanówku koło Obornik*, „Kronika Wielkopolski”, 1995, 1, p. 61-72.

<sup>18</sup> *Aufnahmebedingungen der Berliner Lungenheilstätte „Schöneberg”* in Sternberg/Nm., Februar 1930, Verein zur Bekämpfung der Tuberkulose in Schöneberg e.V. Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv. Rep. 55 VIIb 196; R. Piotrowski, *Erbe und Zukunft. Soziohistorische Studie der Traditionen des öffentlichen Gesundheitswesens in eh. Ostbrandenburg bis 1945*. Gorzów Wlkp. 2010.



The Prussia tuberculosis sanatorium in Ronsdorf near Cologne (2 photographs)

owner of this property. In 1920 the city of Schöneberg was incorporated and became a local government district of Berlin.

Due to economic difficulties in the years after the World War First and the “politically agitated and misguided patients in the men’s division” (further details were not to determine this) the sanatorium had to be closed. It was reopened in January 1921, but only for female patients.

The admission requirements for the sanatorium in 1930 provide an insight into the allocation process:

*In zwei Gebäuden können 102 Kranke in Schlafräumen mit 1-4 Betten untergebracht werden. [...] Die Lungenheilstätte „Schöneberg“ nimmt lungenkranke Frauen und Mädchen (vom zehnten Lebensjahre an) auf, deren Leiden Aussicht auf Heilung oder doch erhebliche Besserung bietet und die nach ärztlichem Urteil für eine Heilstättenkur geeignet sind. Dem leitenden Arzt der Anstalt, Dr. Schwalm, bleibt es vorbehalten, ungeeignete Patienten zu entlassen. Die Kurdauer beträgt in der Regel drei Monate; ist eine Kurverlängerung erforderlich, so wird sie rechtzeitig vom leitenden Arzt bei der Entsendestelle beantragt. Die Aufnahme von Kranken erfolgt durch die Auskunft- und Fürsorgestelle für Tuberkulose in Berlin-Schöneberg, Neues Rathaus, wohin Aufnahmeanträge unter Beifügung eines ärztlichen Zeugnisses zu richten sind<sup>19</sup>.*

In 1928, nearly 60 percent of the patients in Torzym were suffering of advanced stages of the tuberculosis disease and 37 percent had an “active” tuberculosis. In 1924, about 20 percent of the patients were dismissed as incurable (in 1928: 50 percent). The number of surgical procedures increased from 1922 to 1928 on a rata from 1,7 to 20,1 percent. The facility in Torzym paved itself a way during the transformation from a traditional medicinal sanatorium into a hospital specialized in lung diseases and surgery<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>19</sup> Aufnahmebedingungen der Berliner Lungenheilstätte...

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, H. Winz, *Es war in Schöneberg. Aus 700 Jahren Schöneberger Geschichte*, Berlin 1964.

Both former sanatorium buildings are located in the northwest of the city in a wooded area at Biernackiego Street. Even today one of the two buildings has its original function. One of the sanatorium buildings is today a cardiac rehabilitation clinic (Oddział Rehabilitacji Kardiologicznej) and the other building is used as a clinic for lung diseases and tuberculosis (Oddział Pulmonologii, Oddział Gruźlicy i Chorób Płuc). The whole area is a part of the Lubuski Szpital Specjalistyczny Pulmonologiczno-Kardiologiczny.