

Wrocław is a city with over a thousand years of turbulent history. Its state affiliation and religious and social structure have changed several times over the centuries. People of many nationalities and ethnic groups have left their mark on the Wrocław landscape. The city was a prominent place for the emancipation of women and the LGBT+ community, and it is also the place of origin of activists who were among the first in the world to draw attention to the lack of accessibility for people with disabilities. What united all of them was Wrocław.

Even today, the diversity of our city is one of its greatest assets. We celebrate it by constituting a community where everyone has a chance to be themselves. We make sure that we are equal in diversity because Wrocław is a City of Equality.

Let us take a walk along the diversity track in the centre of Wrocław.

**1 Old Town Promenade (Promenada Staromiejska)**

✉ ul. Świdnicka

In the queer-story of Wrocław, or the history of the local LGBT+ community, monuments have played quite a part. One of these was the massive statue of emperor (Kaiser) Wilhelm I, which once stood where the monument to king Bolesław Chrobry is standing now. The author of the statue of the German emperor was the renowned sculptor Christian Behrens, and its unveiling took place in 1896. Over the following years, gay men were meeting near the statue. Everyone in Wrocław – at that time Breslau – and beyond knew the statue’s location, the place was also often reproduced on postcards. Over time, the Nazis started to take advantage of this knowledge, making raids on the men meeting there, and locking them up. German law, specifically its Section 175, which criminalized non-heteronormative men, provided the legal basis for such actions.

Otto Stiebler. Although Stiebler’s was home to the entire multicultural city of Breslau in the 20-year inter-war period, it is only in recent years, already as Mediateka, that the building has become a key place on the map of equality activities. This was due to the regular meetings organised as part of the Living Library project, an international movement promoting human rights and social dialogue. The initiative comes from Denmark and has been present in Wrocław since 2007. The Living Library meetings are organised by the Wrocław-based Diversja Association. In the meetings, everyone can talk to the Living Books, i.e. to the people standing for minorities and social groups threatened by discrimination and exclusion. The visitors to this unique library choose for themselves whom they want to talk to. In the Living Library, you can meet people of different nationalities and religions, non-heteronormative people, or people with disabilities. In 2004, the Council of Europe recognised the Living Library as an official method of human rights education.

In 1970, the Lublin-based actor and social activist Jan Snarski recalled the Promenade and its neighbouring cafes as follows: “Comparing Lublin with Wrocław, I noticed an incredible difference – in Wrocław, the gay life was thriving, day and night.”

Wrocław is also a major place in the history of the emancipation of the LGBT+ community. In the early 1980s, several activists from the capital of Lower Silesia set up the ETAP society here – the first informal gay and lesbian association in the country. The association published its newspaper, organised meetings and ran one of the first clubs for LGBT+ people in Poland. It was also in Wrocław that the idea of introducing an innovative word to describe homosexual men was born. Following discussions, they chose to polonize the English word “gay”.



Old Town Promenade, photo from the WPM UMW collections

**2 Mediatheque (Mediateka)**

✉ Plac Teatralny 5

The seat of Mediatheque, a branch of the City Public Library, is the building that formerly belonged to the famous coffee roastery

Siems, born in 1879 in Breslau. In her career, Margarethe’s longest association was with the opera in Dresden. She had a special relationship with Richard Strauss – she knew him personally and appeared in three premieres of his operas. She dazzled in her roles of Chrysothemis in “Elektra” and Zerbinetta in “Ariadne on Naxos”, but the role of her life was Marschallin in “The Knight of the Rose”, which she played masterfully many times. It was with this role that she bid a solemn farewell to the stage in 1925, on the stage of the Municipal Theatre in her home town. After 1937, she became a professor of singing at the conservatory at the Theatre in Breslau. She accepted the position on one condition: that she was not registered as a member of the NSDAP (which was compulsory for male and female teachers at the time). She was splitting her time between Breslau and Bad Landeck (now Łądek Zdrój), where she owned a small villa.

Margarethe Siems was an outed lesbian. After the war, she formed a couple with the art historian Gerda Weinholz, with whom she raised an adopted daughter. She died in Dresden in 1952.

The founder of the Wrocław Pantomime Theatre, Henryk Tomaszewski, was also associated with the opera. As a soloist on this stage, he danced eleven roles that were considered outstanding between 1949 and 1959. Like Margarethe Siems, Tomaszewski also never concealed his psychosexual orientation, becoming, in a way, the voice of Wrocław’s LGBT+ community.



The Wrocław Opera, photo from the WPM UMW collections

**4 Max Born House**

✉ pl. Wolności 4

The eminent scientist Max Born (1882-1970), one of the fathers of the great revolution in 20<sup>th</sup>-century physics, was born in this house. Because of his Jewish origin, Born lost his licence to practice his profession in 1933. He then fled to the UK, where he continued his scientific career. He received the Nobel Prize in physics in 1954.

Max Born, a teacher of the future inventors of the atomic bomb, was a staunch pacifist himself. Together with his friend Albert Einstein, who shared his peaceful views, he was active in the Pugwash movement of scientists for disarmament and peace. Shocked by the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and painfully aware of the role of scientists in their construction, he addressed his colleagues in his Nobel speech as follows: “We are a great fellowship, men of all nations seeking after the truth. It is my greatest hope that the modern trend to subjugate science to politics and inhuman ends and to erect barriers of fear and suspicion around national groups of scientists will not continue (...) as the mind can grow and bear fruit only in freedom”.



Max Born House, photo from the WPM UMW collections

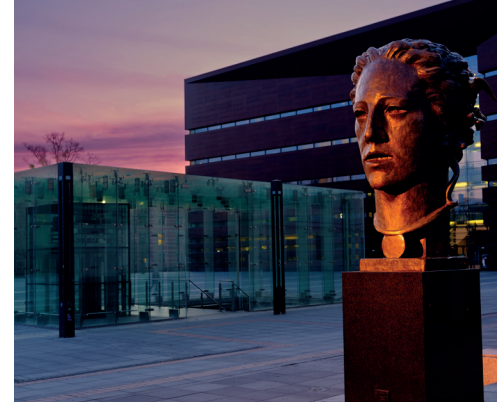
**5 Orpheus**

✉ pl. Wolności 7a

A sculpture that unites nations. In 1942, the Breslau sculptor Theodor von Gosen made a model of Orpheus’s head. In 2016, other Wrocław sculptors, Stanisław and Michał Wysocki, cast it in bronze. German and Polish fates are intertwined in one sculpture, but not only those: the history of the Greek men and women is also inscribed in it. Right next to the monument to the mythical Greek poet was the headquarters of the Nikos Belojanis Union of Political Refugees from Greece in Poland, with its Macedonian branch, the Illinclen Association.

Between 1946 and 1949, because of the civil war in Greece, refugees from Greece and Macedonia arrived in Lower Silesia. Their number is estimated at around 14,000 people. Already in the early 1950s, Wrocław became for the Greeks and Macedonian men and women their capital in exile. In 1953, a Greek school and numerous clubs were opened here. To this day, many of those who arrived then still recall the warm welcome and support that the Lower Silesians showed them in those first years. Today, the Odysseas Association of Greeks in Poland is active in Wrocław. Many Wrocław residents of Greek descent, especially artistic people, are descendants of former refugees.

The Orpheus statue stands in front of the Henryk Tomaszewski Theatre Museum (a branch of the Wrocław City Museum). Master Tomaszewski came from a Polish-German family from Greater Poland. He came to Wrocław in the late 1940s and initially danced in the ballet company of the Wrocław Opera, and in 1956, he founded the then revolutionary, and now legendary Pantomime Theatre. He presented his performances on almost all continents, winning a number of awards and distinctions. Henryk Tomaszewski died in 2001. The museum named after him was created in cooperation with Stefan Kayser, Tomaszewski’s long-term partner. The permanent exhibition features a unique symbol of their love – puppet figures depicting Henryk Tomaszewski and Stefan Kayser.



Orpheus, photo from the WPM UMW collections

**6 Mutual Respect District**

✉ Area of ul. Kazimierza Wielkiego, św. Mikołaja, św. Antoniego and P. Włostowica

Wrocław is the only city in Poland where Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish sanctuaries are located next to each other. They form a small area called the Four Denomination District or District of Mutual Respect. The idea of setting up the District emerged in 1995 among the clergy of the local churches and activists of the Wrocław Jewish Community. The unique character of this place reflects the diversity and tolerance of the city.

One of the District’s sanctuaries is the Evangelical Church, belonging to the Evangelical-Augsburg Divine Providence Parish in Wrocław. It is located at Kazimierza Wielkiego Street, right next to the Royal Palace. This 18<sup>th</sup>-century church is the only one in the city that has been ministering to Wrocław’s Protestant men and women since its inception.

Around the corner, at Św. Antoniego Street is a small church dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua. During its history, which spans more than three centuries, it and its adjoining monastery belonged successively to the Franciscan, Elizabethan, and Salesian orders. At present, the Pauline Fathers look after it. It is worth noting its façade – inscribed in a compact line of townhouses, it is reminiscent of churches in Rome or Naples.

In turn, the White Stork Synagogue (1829), hidden in a courtyard at Włodkowica Street, is not only an example of magnificent classicist architecture but also a testimony to the enormous influence of Jewish people on the history of Wrocław. Today, the synagogue also thrives as a centre of Jewish culture.

The oldest sanctuary of the Four Denomination District is to be found at Św. Mikołaja Street. This small, medieval church once belonged to Catholics, then to Protestants. In 1963, it was handed over to the Orthodox Church and established as the cathedral of the diocese of Wrocław and Szczecin as the Cathedral of the Nativity of the Most Holy Mother of God.



Mutual Respect District, photo from the WPM UMW collections

**7 White Stork Synagogue**

✉ ul. Pawła Włodkowica 7a

The classicist White Stork Synagogue was built between 1827 and 1829 to a design by Carl Ferdinand Langhans. Jewish men and women made up only a fraction of Breslau’s total population, and their percentage in the city’s demographic scale never exceeded 8 per cent. Despite this, this small group of male and female citizens of Breslau made a colossal contribution to every aspect of city life. Among the Jewish community were scientists and scholars – including Nobel Prize winners – whose achievements we still can benefit from today.

The local Jewish community ceased to exist during the Second World War. After 1945, several thousand Polish Jews settled in Wrocław again. However, as a result of the anti-Semitic campaign in the 1960s, most of them left. Jewish life in Wrocław did not revive until the 1990s, after the political transformation.

At present, the local Jewish Community has around three hundred members. A branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland and the Bente Kahan Foundation are thriving. Every year, the people of Wrocław walk in the March of Mutual Respect in memory of the victims of the November 1938 pogrom, known as “Kristallnacht”. The march sets off from the White Stork Synagogue towards the site where the New Synagogue (Nowa Synagoga na Wygonie) – the second largest in Germany – stood until November 1938.



White Stork Synagogue, photo from the WPM UMW collections

**8 House of Hanna Krzetuska and Eugeniusz Geppert**

✉ ul. Ofiar Oświęcimskich 1

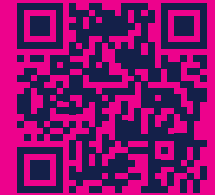
The former house of the Wrocław patrician Heinrich von Rybisch was built in 1531. All that remains of it today is a Renaissance portal with a unique birthing scene. In the 1960s, the flat on the first floor was inhabited by an artistic couple, Hanna Krzetuska and Eugeniusz Geppert.

Particularly noteworthy is the figure of Krzetuska, whose biography reflects the fate of many female artists born at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hanna Krzetuska was born in 1903 in Kraków into a well-known Galician family of Jewish roots. She studied painting in private schools, as women were not yet admitted to universities. During the Second World War, she cooperated with the Underground and was active as an artist, and in 1946, she came to Wrocław with her husband to reactivate the local art academy. She soon became a local activist, crusading for studios and exhibition spaces for creative individuals, as well as for the purchase of their works for state collections. In 1961, she co-organised the legendary Wrocław Group, an association of local male and female artists. Her abstract art stood in contrast to the academic colourism that dominated the painting studios of the local academy in the early days. Hanna remained in the shadow of her husband for many years. “Geppert’s painting wife” is how she was often referred to. Even after Eugeniusz Geppert’s death, she was always presented in the context of her marriage to the painter. In her memoirs “60% Abstraction”, she wrote as follows: “Many people do not know who I am and that «I paint too». Only it is not Geppert’s wife who paints, but Hanna Krzetuska”.

Hanna Krzetuska died in 1999 in Trzebnica. Today, the Art Transparent Foundation operates in her former flat in Wrocław and presents the achievements of Hanna Krzetuska and other often forgotten female artists from the Wrocław Group.



House of Hanna Krzetuska and Eugeniusz Geppert, photo from the WPM UMW collections





9 Gallery of Great Wrocław Residents – Male and Female

📍 Old Town Hall, Market Square (Rynek)

The Old Town Hall – the most important historical building in Wrocław – is now home to the Museum of Burgeois Art (a branch of the Wrocław City Museum). In 1997, the Gallery of Great Wrocław Residents was established in its interiors. The exhibition of marble busts of famous Wrocław men and women includes thirty sculptures presenting people of both Polish and German nationality – Catholics, Protestants and Jews. In 2020, the last sculpture was unveiled: a bust of a man who opened (or rather broke down) the ‘door to accessibility’.

The famous neurosurgeon Ludwig Guttmann, born in 1899 in Tost (now Toszek), first studied in Breslau and then worked here (among other places at the former Jewish Hospital). He devoted his entire life to treating patients with spinal cord injuries. After escaping to England in 1938, he organised sports competitions for his male and female patients at the spinal injury clinic in Stoke Mandeville. His pioneering methods of treatment and rehabilitation, now recognised as the standard of care for people after spinal injury, were initially met with a lack of understanding from the medical community. Over time, however, as the effects of these methods became apparent, they started being implemented in clinics around the world.

Guttmann also spearheaded the first Paralympic Summer Games, held in Rome in 1960. He was awarded a British knighthood for his services to medicine and his contribution to the development of sports for people with disabilities. One of his protégés, multiple Paralympic medalist Caz Walton, said this about him: ‘I think Sir Ludwig just changed the world for us – people with disabilities; it was a complete step change... He came in, he had a vision (...) he did change the world’.

to the injustice of others endanger Christian honour with their unchristian behaviour”. For her unbending stance, she was dismissed from all ministries in the church and eventually imprisoned in the concentration camp at Ravensbrück. She spent almost a year there. Thanks to the heroic efforts of her sister Charlotte, she returned to Breslau in 1943.

After the war, she was a pastor in Frankfurt am Main, where she died at the age of forty-nine. To this day, it is not known how many people of Jewish origin she saved, as she kept no records for security reasons. Her sister knew of at least 120 who had been saved.



Church of St. Mary Magdalene, photo from the WPM UMW collections

11 Disabled Supporters Club Association – KKN Wrocław

📍 ul. Szewska 66/67A

The spirit of Ludwig Guttmann still hovers in Wrocław, as the city is a strong centre of sports activities for people with disabilities. Among the forerunners of Wrocław parasport was the famous swimmer Marek Petrusiewicz, who, after his leg was amputated, joined one of the first sections of swimmers with disabilities in the 1960s. It was from this section that the provincial sports association for disabled people, ‘START’, grew up. Its male and female athletes win medals at major competitions – for example, Jakub Tokarz, who brought home the gold medal in parakayaking from the 2016 Summer Paralympic Games.

Wrocław is also home to one of the oldest sports clubs for deaf people in Europe. The Wrocław Sports Club of the Deaf ‘Świt’, founded in 1925 in Lviv, is the only sports club relocated to Wrocław from the former South-Eastern Borderlands. Athletes from ‘Świt’ regularly break the medal bank at the summer and winter games of the deaf.

In addition, the WKS Śląsk club has teams of blind football, i.e. of visually impaired people, and AMP football – of the amputees. On the practical and scientific side, parasport is managed by one of Poland’s first Paralympic Sports Departments at the Wrocław Academy of Physical Education.

Of course, there would be no sport if it were not for its male and female fans and supporters. And the members of the KKN – Wrocław Disabled Supporters Club Association know best how to cheer. The association also runs a day centre at Szewska Street, giving support to people with disabilities. The people of Wrocław often see their distinctive bus on the streets with a big sign: ‘For us there are no barriers’.



Szewska Street, photo from the WPM UMW collections

12 Former tenement house “the Golden Sceptre”

📍 ul. Kuźnica 22

A well-known inn, “Pod Złotym Berłem” (the Golden Sceptre), frequented by visiting Poles, had been operating in the building since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The whole of Kuźnica Street could be called “a Polish street”, because in addition to the above-mentioned one, there were also other inns here with familiar-sounding names:

“Pod Czerwonym Polakiem” (the Red Pole), “Pod Miastem Warszawą” (the Warsaw Town) or “Pod Dwoma Polakami” (the Two Poles). In the “Pod Złotym Berłem” inn, the author of the Polish national anthem, Józef Wybicki, was a guest. He arrived in Breslau in 1803 and stayed here for almost two years. During this time, his sons attended schools and were tutored by representatives of the local Polish community. It was never particularly large, though; at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Polish minority in Breslau consisted of only around 9,000 people. After Poland regained independence in 1918, this number fell by almost half. Despite this, the Polish men and women who remained in Breslau founded and ran societies of an educational, economic, and charitable nature. After 1945, they also played a significant role in rebuilding Wrocław. Familiar with the city and the German language, they helped the new residents.

Between 1945 and 1948, the ethnic landscape of the capital of Lower Silesia underwent a complete transformation. Wrocław was filled with Poles arriving from various parts of the country within its pre-war borders. Most people came from Greater Poland. There was also a sizable group of settlers from Mazovia, among whom were many people with experience in the ghettos of central Poland and participants in the Warsaw Uprising. In addition to newcomers from all provinces of that time, people from the former South-Eastern Borderlands also settled in the city. However, they were few compared to the other groups. Those living in Wrocław today are the descendants of those who primarily came here in the first post-war years.



Memory board, photo from the WPM UMW collections

13 University of Wrocław

📍 pl. Uniwersytecki 1

Historically, this is one of the most important places on the equality map of Wrocław. At the first-ever women’s congresses, in the press and at rallies, Lower Silesian female activists loudly demanded access to education at all levels. When the goal was achieved, the first female students appeared at the University of Breslau in 1908. Although earlier, in 1900, the chemist Clara Immerwahr had been the first to obtain a doctorate at the Breslau university – but this was by way of exception, after obtaining the relevant permits.

In the scientific world, the most famous female graduates of the local university remain physicist Hedwig Kohn, later a professor at Wellesley University in Massachusetts, and mathematician Nelly Neumann. Both proved that a woman could succeed in science, which was considered to be the domain of men. Both were also Jewish. Hedwig Kohn, who worked as a scientist at the University of Breslau, managed to escape to the USA after the outbreak of the Second World War. Nelly Neumann was murdered in the Minsk ghetto in 1942. Internationally recognised female physicians, including dermatologist and geneticist Helen Ollendorff-Curth and paediatrician Erika Bruck, were also associated with Breslau University.

The University of Breslau has also had quite an impact on the development of the LGBT+ emancipation movement. In the 1887/88 semester, Magnus Hirschfeld was a student at this university. It was him who, a few years later, founded the Scientific and Humanitarian Committee in Berlin, the first association in the world to fight for the rights of non-heteronormative people. The headquarters of the association and of the Institute of Sexual Science, which Hirschfeld established, became a meeting place and support for gay people. The first queer cultural content was created there, including a film and a magazine. In 1921, doctors working in the institute conducted the world’s first medical gender reassignment process.

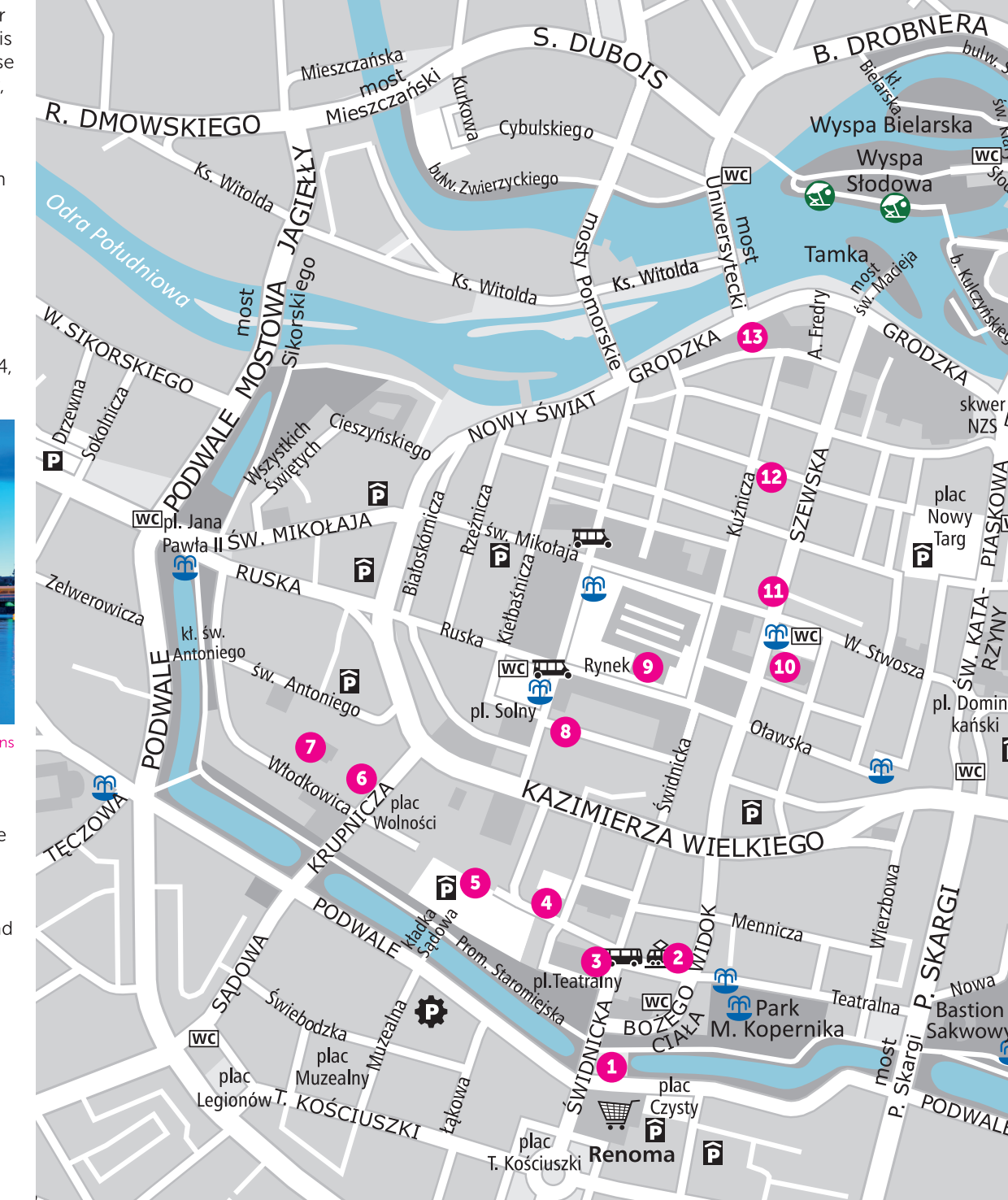
Hirschfeld studied in Breslau for only one semester but probably made many acquaintances there. His later activities were supported by friends and close colleagues associated with the Breslau University, including the doctors Otto Juliusburger, Ludwig Levy-Lenz, and Fritz Flato, as well as the lawyer Bernhard Shapiri. When, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hirschfeld began his efforts to abolish Section 175 of German Law that criminalised non-heteronormative men, an appeal to the authorities on this issue was signed by many professors at the University of Breslau, headed by the surgeon Jan Mikulicz-Radecki. Alice Rosenstein, the first European female neurosurgeon and the first person to stand up for non-heteronormative soldiers as early as 1944, was also a graduate of the University of Breslau.



University of Wrocław, photo from the WPM UMW collections

The annals of Wrocław’s diversity do lead us through all places – familiar and those less popular. Above all, however, it is a story about the city’s male and female residents: the people who came here in the past and the people who are still arriving, who differ in so many ways but who jointly create a place that is common, tolerant and open. It is to them that we owe the diversity and climate that we can enjoy today. This diversity is worth knowing and appreciating.

**Social Diversity Department**  
**Municipality of Wrocław**  
📍 ul. Gabrieli Zapołskiej 4, Wrocław  
☎ +48 71 777 73 73  
📧 drs@um.wroc.pl



**Key:**  
🅑 Car park 🅑 Indoor car park 🅑 Park&Ride 🅑 Historic tram stop 🅑 Historic bus stop 🅑 Tourist Melex vehicles stop 🅑 Beach 🅑 Fountain 🅑 Public toilets 🅑 Shopping centre 🅑 Police station

📍 Tourist information points

📍 ul. Graniczna 190 ☎ +48 519 509 336  
📍 ul. Piłsudskiego 105 ☎ +48 519 509 337  
📍 Rynek 14 ☎ +48 71 344 31 11

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