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Double rebuilding

Retrieving the identity in post-war reconstruction of Main Town Gdańsk

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Abstract

As a result of the war, the city center of Gdańsk was almost destroyed. The degree of its destruction was estimated at nearly 90%. With the war’s end, a new stage in the history of Gdańsk began. New inhabitants appeared; some came from other regions of former Poland, e.g., Vilnius and Lviv. It is hard to imagine, but the decision to rebuild the city in its historical shape was not evident. Eventually, the authorities of the time were persuaded to this concept. The impact of economic, political, and social changes was significant in rebuilding the city physically and in terms of Polish identity. The reconstruction became a source of actual, and not merely propaganda, pride for multiple generations of Gdańsk citizens, and therefore also one of the significant aspects in the crystallization of local identity in the post-war decades.

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1. Introduction

Scope of the research

Places all over the world face various forms of disasters. The rebuilding process is a complex multidimensional process responding to the destruction on multiple levels. Years of World War II brought tremendous destruction to many places that faced issues that the conflict created. The image of tabula rasa is often perceived as a possibility of redesigning and transforming, improving for the better. However, realization forms are frequently far from the plans and wishes.

Gdańsk, one of the leading Polish cities, was in a unique situation at the end of World War II. The last days of March 1945 were when fierce fighting between the German and Polish armies, supported by Soviet forces, took place, leaving the city center in ruin, a pyramid of rubble and ashes with 90% of the buildings destroyed (Friedrich, 2015).

Regaining control over the city provoked rapid changes on the multitude of surfaces. Gdańsk became a new city in a double sense. After years of occupation, it became Polish again. Found in profound distress, recovery of the city meant rebuilding the tangible of the urban tissue also required the revival of the intangible ties in the search for identity and belonging. The war's end activated the flow of transformative events, which included migrations, political transformations, and new values adaptation or economic poverty consequences.

From the first days, significant population transitions started. Thousands of Germans left voluntarily or were later banished following the arrangements of the Potsdam Conference. In their place, Poles had been resettled from the East (e.g., Grodno, Vilnius, or Lviv) and central Poland. The initial status of Gdańsk as a Polish city was not certain. The lives of many were marked by longing, temporality, and struggles of maladjustment to the new place. (Bykowska, 2005) All emotions and feelings played a relevant role in rebuilding the city and, mostly, building the new identity, which could refer only to what was familiar to the newcomers – the history of Poland, not necessarily the history of Gdańsk. (Fredrich, 2015) A challenging economic situation due to postwar destruction and poverty shaped the reality of daily life. The economics of shortage meant a deficit of goods, investment goods, and labor power. Limited finances covered the needs of the most urgent areas, the shipyard and the port. Complications and delays in the reconstruction of some buildings resulted in progressive destruction due to weather conditions and theft, mainly of the scarce building material. (Gawlicki, 2012)

Significant transformations were also seen in the political situation. The end of the Nazi domination over Poland followed a new Soviet occupation. A new government was founded under the leadership of the communist Polish United Workers' Party. (Davies, 2005)

Aims to establish a socialist state highly influenced everyday reality. Political persecution characterized the early years of the communist administration. Also, the change in political values greatly influenced decisions and financial aid distribution of the rebuilt areas and buildings.

Apart from social, economic, and political changes, the physical tissue of the city was also transforming. Reconstruction proposals included moving the city center to the new, modern area, leaving a sea of damaged buildings as a reminder of wartime cruelty, or constructing a highly modern city. At the end of 1947, the historic conservator decided to protect the area of the Main Town (mostly destroyed part of the city), and the reconstruction followed roughly

the historic form while constructing interiors in a modern way. (Friedrich, 2015).

The report aims to evaluate the form and process of rebuilding the historic part of Gdańsk in connection to the often omitted social factor. Through analysis of societal feelings at the time, main everyday struggles and achievements impacted decisions adopted. The study investigates the postwar rebuilding process of Main Town in Gdańsk, which lasted between 1945-1960; nevertheless, most of the decisions that shaped the process were taken before 1949. From that moment on, all decisions were made from the headquarters in Warsaw, significantly influencing the ignoring of local factors in the process (Najmajer, 2001).

The analysis tries to determine the relationship between the form of post-disaster reconstruction and the creation of a place's identity. It reflects on the complex and intertwined factors that played an immense role in architectural processes and aims to answer the question:

Did the process and reconstruction decisions in post-war reconstruction between 1945-1960 help in retrieving the identity of Gdańsk?

The following questions to see might help in the exploration of the subject: What impact did the postwar realities of society have on postwar reconstruction decisions and urban transformations? What were societal feelings in the process of rebuilding? What other factors influenced decisions and the process of reconstruction? In what form was ultimately Gdańsk rebuilt?

The analysis focuses on the area of the Main City, which is the central historic part of Gdańsk. Its area is a crystallizing element at the beginning of the city, which received a city location in 1343 and was granted city rights in 1378. (Czeszunist, 1969). It is considered a representative part of the Downtown district of Gdańsk and creates a compact historic complex.

Literature and sources review

The report examines the transformations and modifications Gdańsk underwent in the first postwar years. The city was entangled in the political, ideological, and cultural realities of the time, which immensely impacted the complex reconstruction processes. The analysis is not based on dry facts but rather on the intricate connections between decision-making and the formation of a new city in a physical way, but also issues of values, experiences, mentalities, and feelings prevailing in society.

Primary sources.

The primary sources are archival materials, copies of Dziennik Bałtycki between 1945 and 1960 provided by the Gdańsk Library of the Polish Academy of Science [PAN - Polska Akademia Nauk], and the Baltic Digital Library [Bałtycka Biblioteka Cyfrowa]. Information and current affairs journals appearing in Gdańsk Pomerania became a prosperous source of information on the daily experiences in postwar Gdańsk. The chronicle also published a section of inhabitant's letters, including responses to certain occurrences in the form of complaints, appeals, or thoughts. The collection of surviving copies provides multi-faceted data. The narrative presented on the journal's main pages, the articles' content, and the repetition or lack of specific information allowed forming of assumptions about everyday life and relevant topics. Additionally, the photo albums collection There

was Gdańsk [Był sobie Gdańsk] and other photographic sources provide information on spatial changes, presenting pictures from various city history moments. Moreover, they manage to capture bits of everyday activities and reality. The reconstruction process details are withdrawn from several announcements, public speech records, and official decrees forming the chosen direction. Many of them can also be found in Dziennik Bałtycki. Furthermore, the published collection of reconstruction plans, drawings, and design copies, but also initial assessments from inventory examination, contain first-hand information on the course and form of the operation. Social aspects and prisms of everyday life are essential in the study, provided by the collection of Memories of the Reconstruction of the Main Town [Wspomnienia z odbudowy Głównego Miasta] gathered by Trojanowska Izabella in 1997 supplement the image of postwar Gdańsk.

Conceptualizing the subject.

Secondary sources provide significant knowledge and background for conducting the analysis. Reconstruction of the Main Town in Gdańsk in the years 1945–1960 [Odbudowa Głównego Miasta w Gdańsku w latach 1945-1960] by Jacek Friedrich from 2015 draws an overview of the agencies, the course of events, and the context of all happenings. The destruction of World War II affected most people and their mundane living

conditions. Gdańsk 1945-1965 by Tadeusz Bolduan from 1967 and Gdańsk - a new city. Shaping society and living conditions in 1945–1970 [Gdańsk miasto od nowa] by Piotr Perkowski from 2020 present a frequently omitted subject of social aspects and challenges they face in everyday life.

Social changes and sense of belonging.

Changes in sovereignty over the city and lands imposed significant social changes. Great migrations began driven by a multitude of reasons. The city became Polish again after years of occupation, holding a high aspiration for rebuilding the Polish identity. The following matters are presented in publications such as The Swiftly Retrieved City [Gdańsk. Miasto szybko odzyskane] by Sylwia Bykowska from 2005, Gdańsk: from German Ness to Polishness [Gdańsk: od niemieckości do polskości] by Grzegorz Berendt from 2009, Gdańsk 1945-1949: Taming the place [Gdańsk 1945-1949: Oswajanie miejsca] by Jacek Friedrich from 2001, or Remembrance and identity policies towards (un)wanted heritage. From Gdańsk to Gdańzig [Polityki pamięci i tożsamości wobec (nie)chcianego dziedzictwa. Od Gdańska do Gdańzigu] by Małgorzata Dymnicka and Jakub Szczepański from 2006.

Physical rebuilding.

The architectural process of the physical reconstruction of the urban fabric was described by Marcin

Gawlicki in The historic architecture of Gdańsk in the years 1945-1951 [Zabytkowa architektura Gdańska w latach 1945-1951] from 2012 and Jerzy Stankiewicz in Reconstruction of the historical complexes of Gdańsk after 1945 [Odbudowa zabytkowych zespołów Gdańska po 1945] from 1979. All of the sources mentioned above draw a general image of the recovery of monuments from the first years' lack of response and deepening of the damages through initial reconstruction plans, the beginning of security measures in 1946, the inventory, reconnaissance, and finally, the reconstruction from a particular perspective. Piotr Najmayer presents several proposals in The historic center of Gdańsk - reconstruction or construction of a new district? [Historyczne centrum Gdańska - odbudowa czy budowa nowej dzielnicy?] and Jacek Friedrich in Two visions of the reconstruction of Gdańsk: "historical" and "creative" on the example of the discussion around the development of Szeroka Street [Dwie wizje odbudowy Gdańska: „historyczna” i „twórcza” na przykładzie dyskusji wokół zabudowy ulicy Szerokiej], both from 2001's article collection Teka Gdańska 4. Massive destruction of 90% of the area was extensively mapped by Bohdan Szermer and Jerzy Stankiewicz in Gdańsk, published in 1962, including planned reconstruction conditions. Further insightful publications of the latter authors followed, describing various aspects of the reconstruction.

2. Historical context

The history of Gdańsk dates back to 980, functioning as a port city on the Baltic Sea (Bolduan, 1967). Accessibility to the sea granted Gdańsk a unique position. The location of Gdańsk on the main waterway in the country played a significant role in the development and character of the city. Two opposing expansion goals intersected the area - the Polish state striving north and the German state striving to develop East. The operation of these forces influenced the fate of Gdańsk for centuries. (Czeszunist, 1969)

Captivity and forms of occupation

The time of captivity and occupation of the city was long and existed in various forms, significantly shaping it on many levels. The years of captivity left their mark mainly on the Gdańsk community.

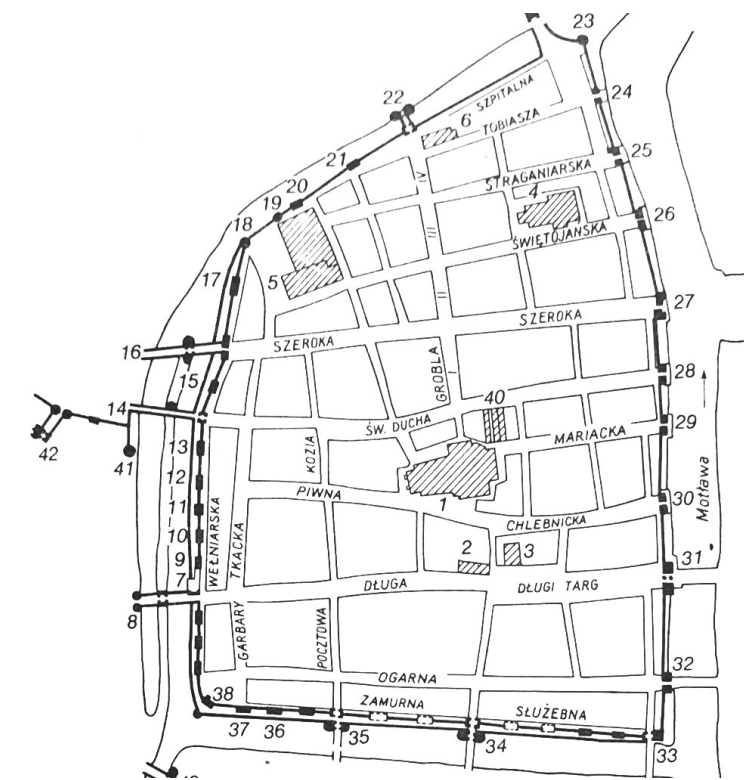
The first armed occupation occurred between 1308-1466 when the German Teutonic Order occupied the city. (Cieślak, 1978) The next period of occupation began in 1793 with the Second Partition of Poland. The Prussian occupation significantly limited the economic development of Gdańsk, although it still granted little freedom to the presence of Polish life and science. (Bolduan, 1967) The significant position of Germany in the economic and cultural field meant that most of the inhabitants of Gdańsk acculturated and began to quickly identify with German culture. (Berendt, 2009) Gdańsk was temporarily excluded from Prussian rule as a Free City in 1807-1814, although re-entered the Prussian state

quickly after it (Bolduan, 1967). After over a hundred years of dependence, the end of the First World War brought hope. Wilson's program assumed the creation of an independent Poland along ethnic borders with access to the sea. Ultimately, the area was defined according to the decision of the Treaty of Versailles on June 18, 1919, as the "Free City of Gdańsk", which was under the care of the League of Nations, essentially politically independent of the Republic. Population declaring German nationality dominated all social layers of Gdańsk, guaranteeing the German population freedom in creating the city's cultural image. (Berendt, 2009) Poles, as a minority, were systematically pushed to the social and decision-making margins (Bolduan, 1967).

The number of Poles was estimated at 20-35 thousand people, which indicates 5.2-9.2% of the entire population of Gdańsk (Echo Gdańskie, 1926). However, the classification was not easy because the qualification criteria were problematic, wondering whether it was the origin, the language used, or perhaps the feeling of belonging to an ethnic group.

The next, last stage of occupation falls during World War II. On September 1, 1939, the Polish Military Transit Depot "Westerplatte", a peninsula at the mouth of the Vistula River, came under fire. The Free City of Gdańsk was incorporated into the Third German Reich. Poles from Gdańsk during this period were persecuted, and many of them were executed. (Bolduan, 1967)

Figure 1.
Plan of the Main City of Gdańsk,
around 1500.



The Main City before 1945

The urban fabric of Gdańsk's Main Town dates back to the Middle Ages. In the 14th century, it was surrounded by a moat and defensive walls. The area consisted of a network of 9 main streets perpendicular to the Motława River and two parallel ones, including several streets of secondary significance.

Limitation by walls resulted in a significant density of buildings throughout the years on narrow plots arranged perpendicularly to the main streets. The buildings mainly included tenement houses inhabited by a group of townspeople. They filled the entire plot and stretched to a depth of 14 to 20 m, with broader and higher patrician houses on larger plots. The buildings outside the area of the Main Town differed significantly, smaller, poorer, and more diversified in function. The characteristic tenement houses of the Main Town underwent various redevelopments provoked by damages or the need to adapt. Later changes of the 19th century, which were related to the development of the Prussian administration, the reduction of the importance of Gdańsk in Polish overseas trade, the development of an industry or significant social changes (the decline

of the importance of the patricians, the influx of Prussian officials, merchants, and workers) influenced the development of this part of the city. Much denser housing became a nuisance for previous residents who moved to suburban residences while buildings were adapted to the needs of merchants and other erected functions. Some tenement houses were demolished, and new ones were erected instead on the site of several plots.

It was not until the 1930s that an attempt was made to restore or protect the remaining tenement buildings, mainly in Mariacka, św. Ducha, Piwna, Chlebnicka and Długi Targ streets. The pre-war cubature of the historic buildings amounted to almost 950,000 m², consisting mainly of bourgeois and patrician tenement houses. (Szermer, 2001)



Figure 2.
Highly densified urban fabric of
the Main Town around 1930.

World War II destruction

The last days of March brought the destruction of the Main Town area. Several days of fighting included the attack of Soviet troops, defending German troops, and their hasty evacuation. (Friedrich, 2015)

The city was bombed and torn apart. Streets were full of rubble, and abandoned war equipment, deserted and smoldering for weeks. (Szermer, 1971) Fires were the most significant threat, and they caused tremendous damage to the maximally dense buildings with many wooden elements (ceilings, staircase construction, roofs). The city's destruction reached up to 60%, and the city center up to 90%. They included buildings, installation

and communication networks, the port, and industrial plants. (Szermer, 2001)

The city was covered with 3 million cubic meters of rubble (Szermer, 1971). So wounded, destroyed, and depopulated, the city returned to Poland.



Figure 3.
Postwar image of the Main Town.



Legend
 bright red - completely destroyed
 dark red - partly destroyed
 black - remained (including damaged)
 green - parks and greenery

Figure 4.
Assessment of the
destruction of downtown.

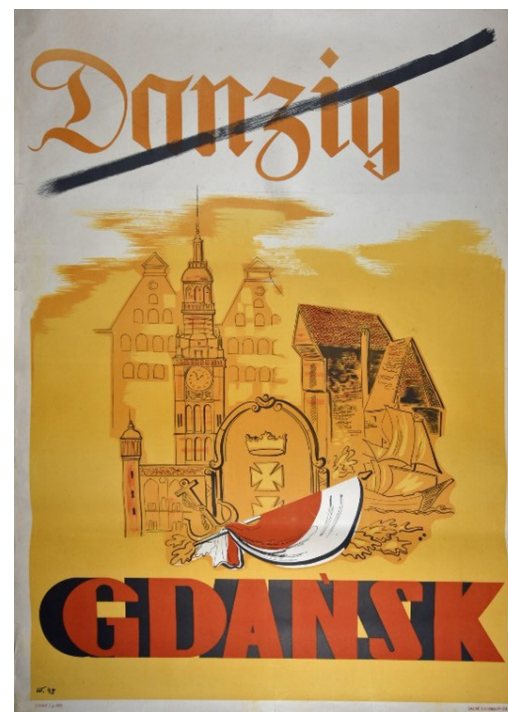
3. Analysis of post-war realities

Belonging

The first weeks were uncertain. The city was snatched from German hands, but no final decisions were made. There was concern that the city would again return to the pre-war state of the Free City of Gdańsk. As the reader of Dziennik Bałtycki writes in the letter, “they scare us with a Free City” - and the pavements of Gdańsk not only trample Polish feet but more: Gdańsk has already grown into Polish hearts.” (DB 168/10 XI 1945). Later actions and decisions confirmed that Gdańsk was being brought under Polish governance. Numerous posters hung around the city that proclaimed, “Gdansk is ours!” or crossed out the German name of the city “Danzig” corrected for the Polish version, “Gdańsk”. The joy of the Polish community at returning to their homeland was visible at every step. The year 1945 ended with the headline “The homeland is alive” (DB 216/31 XII 1945). Due to regaining control, Gdańsk underwent significant rapid changes on many surfaces, mainly in the social, economic, and political spheres.

Figure 5.
Poster “Gdańsk ours!”
1945

Figure 6.
Poster “Danzig. Gdańsk.”
1945



Resettlements and great migrations

The ethnic structure of post-war Gdańsk changed utterly. The end of the war started the great resettlement movements.

In the summer of 1945, 8,525 people identified as Poles were registered, as many as 123,932 Germans and a small group of 1,572 foreigners. (Berndt, 2009) A large part of the German population escaped at the time of the war when the Polish and Soviet Army took control of the city; nevertheless, they remained the dominant ethnic group. The migration movement gained a rapid acceleration with the decisions of the Potsdam Conference (17 VII- 2 VIII 1945), confirming the belonging of Gdańsk Pomerania to Poland, including ordering the expulsion of the remaining Germans. Already in November 1945, Poles exceeded the number of Germans. By September 1946, Poles had increased to 151,185, while the number of Germans had decreased to 13,380. One year after the liberation of Gdańsk, about 750 people of the German population officially remained in Gdańsk. (Berndt, 2009) Newspapers regularly informed about the state of action, and advertising free travel offers for Germans leaving Poland (DB 168/10 XI 1945).

In addition, people came from the East. The change in Poland's borders forced mass migrations. The repatriation operation turns out to be very tiring and risky. There were repeated calls for more care for repatriates. There have been cases of long journeys resulting in death from frost or starvation. (DB 200/12 XII 1945, DB 138/12 X 1945) The ones reaching the goal were desperately wishing for a safe space. Often wishing for the ability to go back to their homes and lands that were forced to leave behind. (Bykowska, 2005) The first inhabitants settled in less damaged districts than the Main Town, such as Oliwa or Wrzeszcz. (Bolduan, 1967)

The prevailing post-war chaos, the lack of knowledge about the available accommodation or employment opportunities for newcomers, and the newly emerging administrative institutions had problems with controlling the migration processes with their immense speed and scale. Confusion, conflicting decisions, and spontaneous (or often referred to as “wild”) settlements became a norm.



Figure 7.
Germans forced to leave
Gdańsk, 1946.

Taming the place, identity building

The post-war reconstruction of Gdańsk was unique due to the reconstruction of the city in a double sense. In addition to the physically devastated urban fabric, the city's identity in the longed-for Polish affiliation also had to be rebuilt.

Gdańsk stood on the verge of creating a new community taming the new place and everyday life. As one of the newly arrived habitants wrote: "Everywhere here they demolish and build; not so much the city itself, but also its new life. There is sometimes a certain guiding thought in this, but the natural law of community formation prevails. Nowhere today in Poland is there such intensity in the emergence of a new community." (DB 57/22 VII 1945) The process of taming the place, which consisted of validating one's presence in a new place and adapting to the new environment, took place individually and collectively (Friedrich, 2001).

Friedrich (2001) points out that various groups shaped the city's postwar image. Firstly, the new incomers, Poles coming from different parts of the country. Mainly from central Poland and the eastern borderlands. This process took place both individually and collectively. They did not have many ties with the city, no roots, no ancestors, and no connections with the place except the Polishness. Secondly, people who lived in Gdańsk before 1945 were commonly called autochthons in the press, identifying with Polishness in varying degrees. Thirdly, the group of combiners, severely damaging sorts

of swindlers and looters, waiting for an opportunity. "In such a strong human wave, which flows smoothly from the Polish lands here towards the sea, dirt must also move. Never mind, it will not defile life, it will not hinder its development." (DB 57/22 VII 1945) They disappeared with the development of local structures and the establishment of order. Lastly, a group of Germans.

A quick bond was created between the newcomers and Gdańsk. The residents consciously state, "We are already Gdańsk inhabitants, who came from various parts to live here and lay the foundations for the emerging maritime state with our work." (DB. 33/23 VI 1945), "We are not here [...] new, strangers, today, we are here like the former owners of this land" (Trojanowska, 1997 p.149). The area of the former Free City was loudly called the "Regained Territories", which was a term created for the needs of political propaganda of the time (Bykowska, 2005). Most of the newcomers knew little about Gdańsk, apart from the stereotypical vision of the city of Maritime Poland or the defense of Westerplatte, which started the German aggression against Poland in September 1939. Regardless of this, the city was indisputably perceived as Polish, unlike other towns annexed

to Poland after the war. (Friedrich, 2001) As a result, the influx of people to Gdańsk was much more massive and spontaneous, and bonds with the place were formed faster.

In post-war Gdańsk, very diverse groups from other civilizations began to come into contact. This often led to differences and even conflicts. Religious life played the most significant role in creating new social bonds. The Catholic Church was the only institution that united all Polish inhabitants. (Bykowska, 2005)

The baggage of experience that everyone carried was also relevant. The experiences of the war left a considerable mark on the Polish population. In addition, the occupation times aroused many fears of hunger, denunciation, deportation, bombing, and death of oneself and loved ones. Everything was feared, and no one was trusted. The news of the war's end brought the promise of stabilization and a return to normality, which naturally created a sense of community among people.

Figure 8.
Inhabitants of Gdańsk
remove rubble together.



Hatred towards Germans

The negative feelings were manifested towards the German population at every step of functioning. Germans, considered as main enemies at the time, were portrayed as “dirty, impure” but also as “intruders”, regularly exhorting in the newspapers’ letters, “Not a single German!” (DB 25/15 VI 1945). The first post-war years were characterized by hatred and pain that marked society after the experiences and atrocities of war.

The previous years of the German occupation significantly limited freedom and Polishness, however the subsequent war experiences were unbearable. Every day the press was flooded with a wave of cruel war stories, such as the production of soap from human fat, including Polish sailors (DB 2/21 V 1945), details of Nazi crimes, or reports from post-war visits to concentration camps (DB 182/22 XI 1945). In later years, the trials of war criminals, mainly in Nuremberg and Dasha, were followed and described in detail on the front pages of newspapers.

Citizens themselves demanded the urgent “destruction of German traces”, mainly in the form of inscriptions, names, and German signs. (DB 25/15 VI 1945) Until the end of 1945, the streets of Gdańsk still had German names. Traces of the German past were systematically removed, calling the action “degermanization”.

There were even voices that German names should disappear from everywhere, including tombstones and historic buildings. The action

did not go that far. (Berendt, 2009) The nomenclature and the form of writing are also saturated with hatred. Multiple cases include writing the word “german” with a lowercase letter or replacing it with “murderers, criminals”. The inhabitants demand compensation by engaging the remaining Germans in Gdańsk to work and rebuild the city. As he writes in a letter to the editor, “We do not want to reciprocate with crematoria or make soap from their bodies, but we only want their work.” (DB 7/26 V 1945)



Figure 9.
Germans evacuating in the
last days of March 1945.

One of the Gdańsk authorities’ most urgent tasks was the German population’s displacement. The nationality verification and rehabilitation of the native population began on July 16, 1945. (Bykowska, 2005) They were either “swallowed” by assimilation or rejected through mass extermination based on the possibility of (Perkowski, 2020). By the end of 1948, 13,424 people had been positively verified, declaring belonging to Poland. (Hejger, 1998).

Most of the newcomers were unfamiliar with the conditions in the area. The native Polish population was often unfairly classified as German, even experiencing robberies, murders, or notorious removals from their homes, as the native German population. (Bykowska, 2005)

New political values and regime

The liberation from the German occupation initiated a new stage in the city's history. March 30 introduced significant changes in Poland, where a new political system, Stalinism, imposed new requirements and values.

Stalinism was based on several pillars. The basic one was the strict centralization of communist power and the economy, including the principles of collectivization of agriculture and nationalization of industry and trade. In addition, an inseparable element was indoctrination, imposed views and values disseminated by ubiquitous propaganda. This involved terror against the system's "enemies", surveillance, informing, and censorship. (Dziabała, 1982) Poles were constantly informed of the unique role of Red Army soldiers in liberating "Polish lands Germanized for years". From the first post-war days, "Tribute to the Red Army" was proclaimed, "The Red Army comes to our aid again," or "the special importance of the Polish-Soviet agreement" was noted (DB 1/1 I 1946). However, the communists did not have much social support in Gdańsk. (Perkowski, 2020). Obedience to propaganda was enforced by intimidation. As it was proclaimed: "Whoever disseminates false news that may harm the interests of the Polish State or undermine the authority of its supreme organs, is liable to imprisonment for up to five years or to arrest." (Dz.U. 1946.30.192) The propaganda mechanisms were at their strongest until Stalin died in

1953 (Perkowski, 2020). Nevertheless, invigilation and denunciatory activities created distrust in society and led to the duality of life, where people presented different images of themselves in the private and public spheres. In addition to the cult of the individual - in Stalin's leadership, the most valuable values were the cult of work, the preservation of universality, classlessness, and social equality. Journals regularly published slogans such as "The basis of our power is work." (DB 150/24 IX 1945) or "Every citizen must work" (DB 15/3 VI 1945). These conditions were not necessarily met in reality.

The political system officially rejected religion, which was highly problematic in the Polish community deeply rooted in Catholicism. Although not supported by the system (forced laicization) faith and religious practices remained central values of the society.

The living conditions

Post-war time was equivalent to the time of basic survival. The needs were enormous, including the most basic ones like having shelter and avoiding cold and hunger. The minimal sense of security and connection with the new place was also important.

Due to significant damage to the city's infrastructure, the housing problem became a vital issue in the city's reconstruction. People arriving in Gdańsk were initially sent to the so-called waypoints offering temporary, meager, overcrowded shelter (DB 118/22 IX 1945). Soon, the "quartering battles" began, where many abandoned properties were settled "in the wild", the same place was randomly assigned to several families (the quarter reports run by the military and the office did not coincide), or families were displaced by the force of the police apparatus (militia) or various conspirators impersonating them. (Perkowski, 2020) Information about abandoned apartments was often a commodity sold mainly at the station, where most migrants arrived. Kadłubowski recalls: "When we arrived in 1946, we were supposed to stay with friends from the transport. But some smart guy came to daddy and said he has a flat - would he like to buy it? And with the help of a few coins, daddy gave us an apartment right away." (Trojanowska, 1997, p. 243). Everything depended on coping in a foreign city and looking for opportunities.

The condition of the buildings left much to be desired. Some areas have gone up in flames, becoming uninhabitable,

including the Main Gdańsk. Only half of the pre-war residential chambers survived, some requiring significant repairs. The home was only a shelter to partially protect from the atmospheric conditions, where no real bonds could be developed. Initially, the gasworks, power plants, and waterworks were out of order, but some districts remained without electricity or transport connections for several months. The majority of the apartments were overcrowded, unheated, and damp. (Perkowski, 2020)

Miserable living conditions, frost, hunger, dirt, and poor hygiene during the war years impacted the population's health. In addition, massively decomposing corpses in the rubble waited for months to be found, initiating the spread of diseases. Mentions published in the press about epidemics, the easy spread of diseases, and calls for research and caution were commonplace. The number of cases of typhus, dysentery, and scarlet fever increased dramatically. Immediate response and improvement of sanitary conditions were necessary. (DB 132/5 X 1945; DB 186/19 IX 1945)



The first months were uncertain and chaotic, resulting in poor organization and the lack of many public institutions. As a result, a lack of work possibilities occurred, dependent on many factors, such as investments, weather conditions, or financial capabilities, resulting in even more significant difficulties in acclimatization or ensuring basic living needs. Hunger was ubiquitous, and food was rationed. This led to a massive scale of looting, theft, and crime to survive or take advantage of the ubiquitous chaos. Overall, living conditions were unimaginably harsh.

Figure 10.
Some of the first rebuilding works.
Destruction of the area is visible in
the background, 1946.

4. Rebuilding | Part one 1945

The subject of reconstruction can be divided into various ways. One of the standard divisions relies on important events significantly impacting the character and the reconstruction process, separated into three periods. The first was often named improvisation, including the time of the city's destruction and waiting for the first decisions and reconstruction actions in 1945. The second consisted in clearing the streets of rubble, selecting, inventorying, and securing the most valuable monuments of Gdańsk, and the beginning of conservation works in the years 1946-1949. The third, in the years 1950-1960, was the time of birth of a new Gdańsk. (Gawlicki, 2012) The significant separation of the stages of development is associated with political changes in Poland. In 1949 the power over reconstruction was taken over by Warsaw's centrist policy. From that moment, the branch of conservators and builders in Gdańsk performed the executive function, not influencing the reconstruction decisions. (Trojanowska, 1997)



Figure 11.
Action of rubble removal by the Royal
Chapel, 1952.

Waiting

The end of warfare was just the beginning of the Main City's destruction. The area remained in ruins for a long time. The remaining parts of the buildings were deprived of utility function and care, waiting for any action.

Firstly, all forms of theft were common. Abandoned monuments were hiding precious objects. Moreover, the ruins and dispersed building materials were of the highest value. Due to the immense scale of the destruction, any makeshift security measures failed. (Gawlicki, 2012) In the first months after the war, newspapers published massively about the severe consequences of theft and the lack of tolerance for it, pointing to the seriousness of the problem (DB 12/2 VI 1945).

Then after a few months, fall and winter came. Atmospheric factors, mainly fall and spring storms, contributed significantly to the deterioration of the buildings. (Najmer, 2020) Missing or structurally weakened roofs and vaults collapsed, creating danger for the passers-by. It also allowed snow and rain to spread destruction of the interiors. (Gawlicki, 2012) "Death lurks in ruins," as articles warned (DB 90/24 VIII 1945; DB 79/21 III 1946). Although the sheltering and use of any possible spaces were understood,

they alerted the need for precaution and awareness, as the influence of harsh atmospheric conditions resulted in buildings collapsing "like houses of cards." (DB 199/11 XII 1945) Only in the fourth quarter, a few selected monuments were secured (Trojanowska, 1997).

The bad condition of the ruin seemed to become a convenient excuse for local and central authorities. The risk of collapsing was sizable, so it was decided to demolish most of them immediately. (Szermer, 2001) In a letter to Dziennik Bałtycki in November 1945, the reader described the city as teeming with action. Not a sight of the building, though, just repeated acts of destruction, where energy and time were invested in demolition instead of protecting the future possible to rebuild. Falls and ruins had become an attraction that made passers-by stop and watch like a spectacle. The letter's author wondered why energy and time were wasted on demolition and not covering the ones suitable for construction. (DB 1946)

1945 was mainly a time of trying to estimate the losses and establish a plan of action, considering the priorities that would allow the city to function. The tragic image of the city conditioned the course of action, starting with the most urgent needs.

Reconstruction priorities

Each reconstruction begins from the most urgent needs and priorities based on the individual city characteristics and approach. It is crucial to acknowledge that Gdańsk, although necessary, was less important than the heavily destroyed capital - Warsaw.

Regarding Gdańsk, one of the main goals was to launch ports. As Dziennik Bałtycki notes, "In the first place, Warsaw, then ports: Gdańsk and Gdynia. At the moment, both are dead." (DB 2/21 V 1945). Running ports were essential for export (mainly coal), but also to receive aid transports, the repatriation influx of Poles, or the removal of Germans. Another priority was to restore the passability of the main routes through the provisional construction of bridges, viaducts, and streets and the launch of essential communication. Then, eliminating the most significant threat from the smoldering remains of buildings. Initially, the remains of undetonated mines were problematic (DB 10/29 V 1945). Moreover, the commissioning of primary sewage, water, gas, and electrical installations was necessary, as well as providing buildings for the state and local government and public utilities such as offices, post offices, education, higher education, and health care facilities. (DB 23/13 VI 1945) Less damaged suburban residential districts and regularly vacated properties of evacuating Germans provided sufficient shelter in the first post-war months. The first need for the development of

residential buildings was indicated in 1946, caused by a significant influx of new people. (Szermer, 2001)

The first months focused on basic activities that would enable the city's functioning. The central sphere of interest was the economic and political situation, including creating Polish offices and institutions. Next, attention was focused on the living needs of citizens or ensuring security. (Gawlicki, 2012)

The reconstruction required the coordination and involvement of many actors. On May 1, Gdańsk Reconstruction Directorate (GDO) was established under the Government Delegation for Coastal Affairs, referred directly to the Ministry of Reconstruction. (Trojanowska, 1997) These were the only institutions involved in the reconstruction process with financial resources. (Najmajer, 2001)

Reconstruction discussions

The enormity of needs and limited financial resources raised concerns about the possibility of rebuilding the city that had been created over the centuries. (Szermer, 2001)

Discussions on the form of rebuilding the Main Town lasted for years.

Among the first proposals were: the reconstruction of only several selected monuments and the addition of co-social buildings, leaving the rebuilt monuments in a cleared, greened park, or even leaving the ruins and rubble as a memento reminiscent of the horror and effects of war. (Friedrich, 2015; Szermer, 2001; Trojanowska, 1997)

Two main visions resulting from an ideological, different view on reconstruction remained in dispute and competition for influence until the end of the reconstruction. On the one hand, the community of architects and historians of architecture associated with the Faculty of Architecture of the Gdańsk University of Technology sought historical reconstruction. On the other hand, architects with a "creative" attitude gathered in the later design body "Miastoprojekt", proclaiming a vision of seemingly historical reconstruction, with a greater tendency to solve social, hygienic, functional problems and even the inclusion of the doctrine of socialist realism. (Friedrich, 2001)

Significant influence on the course of discussion and postulates had the General Conservator of Monuments, Jan Zachwatowicz, and the group associated with the Gdańsk University of Technology

gathering in the Society of Friends of Science and Art, whose members took an active part in the lead of the reconstruction process. (Trojanowska, 1997) They proposed a faithful reconstruction of the Main Gdańsk, later approved by the Nationwide Convention of Conservators in 1947. Their postulates were included in the first local development plan from 1948. (Bolduan, 1967) Zachwatowicz once said, "Unable to agree to take away the monuments of culture from us, we will reconstruct them, we will rebuild them from the foundations in order to pass on to generations, if not the authentic, then at least the exact form of these monuments alive in our memory and available in the materials." (Trojanowska, 1997, p. 48) Such a point of view led to the following years of reconstruction efforts.

In conclusion, both visions had to find a compromise. The historic side abandoned many of the rigorous rules of the classical conservation doctrine for the actual living needs of the inhabitants. On the other hand, the social (creative) side partially understood the need to protect the values of historic cities. (Friedrich, 2001)

Reconstruction | Monument protection in 1945

The first months were devoted to assessing the scale of damage and preparation for the commencement of works in 1946. The authority responsible for the reconstruction's planning, preparation, and implementation was the GDO, organizationally and financially subordinated to the Ministry of Reconstruction, which lacked financial resources to protect the monuments in the first months. What made it even more challenging was that the only acceptable form of investment was subsidies, mainly by state investors preferred in the centralized system. Initially, the Department of Culture and Art was established, which operated within the structure of the Voivodeship Office. Initially, it took over the powers of conservation, but the position of the Provincial Conservator remained vacant. (Gawlicki, 2012)

Elementary protection against unauthorized access started in April 1945, temporarily limiting access to the most valuable buildings. Among them were the Main Town Hall, the Artus Court, the Royal Chapel, St. Mary's Church, St. Catherine, and the Church of St. Bridget. It was only in the fourth quarter of the year, between October 15 and December 31, that official, but still elementary, security and estimation work was undertaken during the first monuments evaluation report. Most of the monuments remained unattended, constantly exposed to harmful weather conditions. (Gawlicki, 2012)



The report on these works calculated the value of the property and the percentage estimate of damage. Gdańsk's war losses were assessed at over 237 million pre-war zlotys. As one of the participants of the works wrote: "The immense variety and richness of all kinds and collections of works of art in the area of the city of Gdańsk, and at the same time the degree of dispersion, destruction, and plunder are such that they cannot be even approximated within the framework of detailed rubrics." (Gawlicki, 2012, p.106)

The fundamental problem was the lack of local institutions responsible for the buildings' condition. Despite the formal establishment, the authorities did not start their activities in 1945. In addition, there needed to be more qualified and experienced conservation staff, and the place of the provincial conservator of monuments was not appointed. Many professors of the Faculty of Architecture of the Gdańsk University of Technology were involved in the reconstruction process, which allowed students to be involved in design and inventory work. (Gawlicki, 2012)

Figure 12.
Attempts to secure one of the monuments, Golden Tenement House.

5. Rebuilding | Part two 1946-1949

Conservation Strategy Formation 1946

Actions in 1946 focused continuously on clearing the rubble from the Main Town area, protection, and preliminary work on the most endangered monument.

The selection of objects to protect was challenging. The destruction evaluation report from 1945 became the first post-war register of monuments in Gdańsk, including 40 objects (Gawlicki, 2012). Ultimately, the list collected the 100 most valuable structures, selected based on the time of creation and style features. Buildings erected in the early 19th century were considered valuable, leaving ones from the 19th and early 20th centuries beyond conservationists' interest. (Gawlicki, 2012)

After June's application to the General Directorate of Museums and Monuments Protection in Warsaw, the state-owned Painting and Sculpture Conservation Studio was

established. In 1947 it transformed into a Conservation Studio under the supervision of the Provincial Monument Conservator in Gdańsk. (Trojanowska, 1997)

From then on, the architectural inventory of monuments and the preparation of reconstruction projects began, parallel with the inventory measurements and photographic documentation. (Gawlicki, 2012) The initial plan of conservation works concerned a few selected most valuable buildings. Significant damage caused by harsh weather conditions disregarded the complete reconstruction of selected monuments in favor of as many provisional protections as possible (mainly provisional roofs). (Gawlicki, 2012)

Despite many difficulties, elementary protections were made, and the first construction works began.

The principle was to restore objects' original, historical state based on information and source documents. Many projects used historical building materials and techniques to reuse original elements recovered from ruins. The enormity of the damage did not allow for a complete restoration, although joint efforts aimed at restoring the function of the religious cult as soon as possible. (Gawlicki, 2012)



Figure 13.
Ruins of the Church of St. Peter and Paul in
Gdańsk, in the background the Main City Hall.

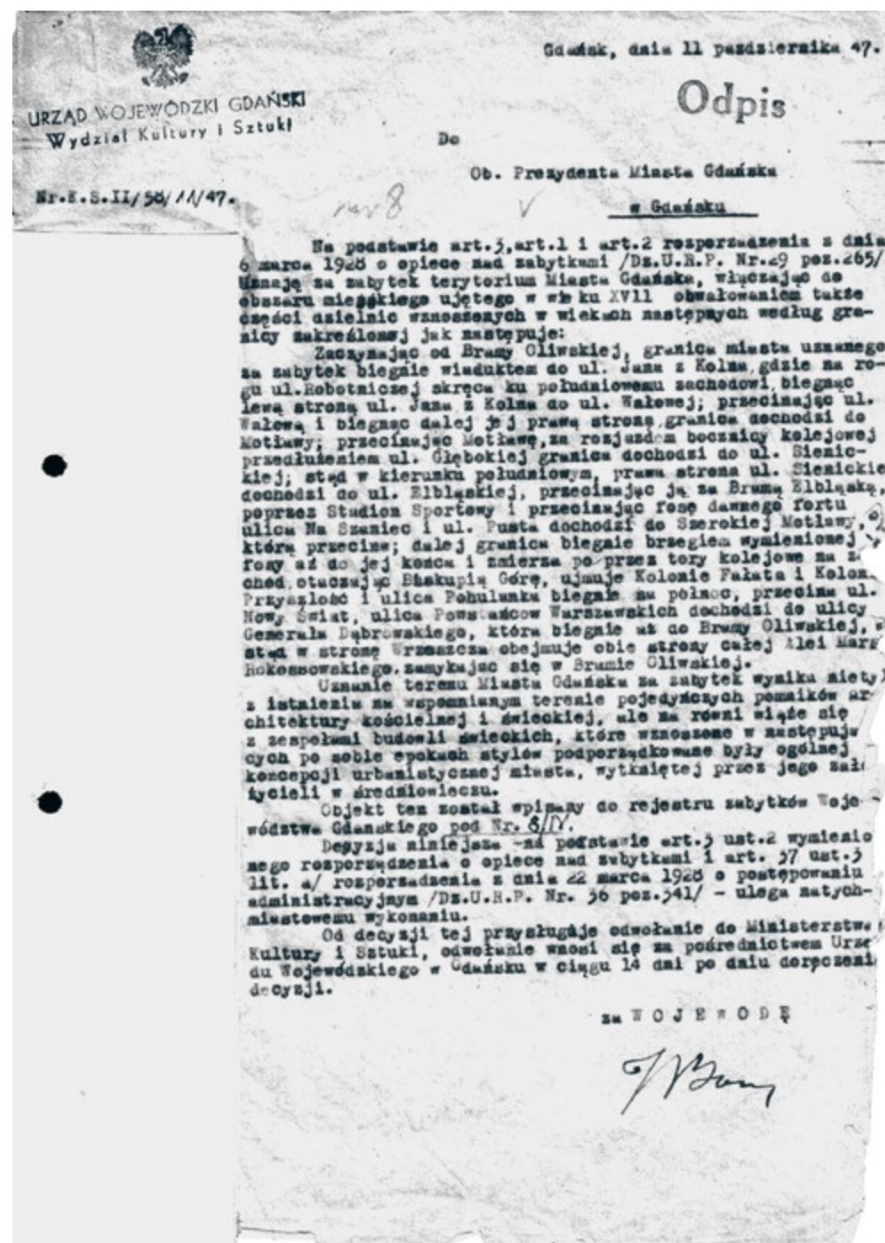


Figure 14.
Conservator's decision to enter the historic center of
Gdańsk into the register of monuments, 11/10/1947.

Reconstruction of the urban fabric

At the time, defining abandoned urban buildings' functions was essential. The Provincial Monument Conservator attempted to protect some of the most valuable bourgeois tenement houses; however, the majority, deprived of immediate intervention, deteriorated, waiting for a chance to be rebuilt. (Gawlicki, 2012)

The first zoning plan for the downtown area omitted the Main City. Instead, "Miasto 1946" constructed a new neighborhood between the central railway station and industrial areas. (Najmayer, 2001) It was a strategy to start rebuilding from a deadlock. So far, dispersed work conducted showed no visible results. The intention was to reconstruct a part that responds to the city's needs, consequently encouraging the gradual recovery of adjacent areas. The project was criticized mainly for building entirely new structures when hundreds of burnt-out tenements waited, decaying and collapsing every day. It also absorbed significant funds reserved for residential building reconstruction. (Najmayer 2001)

Although urban planning concepts for the Gdańsk's city center were defined as early as 1945 at multiple national conservation conferences, they could only be implemented in 1947. (Gawlicki, 2012)

Based on the pre-war act on the protection of cultural goods, the Provincial Conservator of Monuments recognizes the whole of Main Town as a monument. From now on, the Conservation Office must agree on all investments. (Trojanowska, 1997) It was a turning point in the reconstruction of Main Town. In 1948, a team of architects from Gdańsk and Warsaw drew up the Spatial Development Plan for Part of the Old Town Districts, the so-called Zachwatowicz's plan, which outlined the basic framework for Main Town and other historical districts' reconstruction. (Trojanowska, 1997) The main idea was to restore the medieval regulatory plan and preserve the city's traditional culture. (Gawlicki, 2012) It claimed that "monuments should be protected: a) if they are an uncontaminated monument of the past culture, and their preservation is in line with the social interest. (b) if their behavior is not at the expense of forcing people to live in unhealthy conditions c) if by appropriate detours or relocation of the center, it is possible to prevent the unfavorable inhibition of the limited development of the city." (MPZPCDS, 1948)

The plan followed the concept of gathering the greatest treasures in the city's former historic district, pulsating the urban life as the beating heart. (Tołwiński 1948)

The Main Town as a residential neighborhood

In 1947 the Central Office of Projects and Studies of Housing Estate Construction ZOR (CBPiSBO ZOR) was established under the Workers' Housing Estates Construction Directorate (DBOR), which undertook work on the construction and renovation of residential houses. (Trojanowska, 1997)

In 1949, the development project of the Main Town was approved based on the Spatial Development Plan for Part of the Old Town Districts. The reconstruction of the Main Town was planned as a housing estate for workers, received enthusiastically and led by the popularized phrase "The people enter downtown" (Friedrich, 2015, p. 130). The undertaking was planned for 11 years until 1960, with plans to provide housing for 10,000 inhabitants, with 1,203 buildings of over 700,000 cubic meters and 5,390 chambers. DBOR became an investor of all works except for the main monumental pieces. (Trojanowska, 1997) The resolution on the plan was never officially published; however, Zbigniew Żuławski, director of CBPiSBO responsible for the realization, recalled: "A historic resolution of the Council of Ministers was passed: 'To carry out full reconstruction and reconstruction in the old town district of Gdańsk's city center within the framework of a 6-year investment plan. Reconstruct and maintain monuments of urban architecture invaluable for the national culture, rebuild and maintain their historical character along Długa,

Ogarna, Chlebnicka, Mariacka, św. Ducha, the Motława Embankment streets on the section of the historic city and the surrounding area. Create new, hygienic, sunlit urban interiors and rooms within historic urban and architectural layouts, meeting all the requirements of modern construction through reconstruction and revision of buildings". (Trojanowska, 1997, p. 9)



Figure 15.
Rapid reconstruction of Ogarna street, 1949.

The first experimental quarter of residential development in Main Town was built in 1949 between Długa, Grabary, Ogarna, and Pocztowa streets. The works progressed quickly but also sparked a fierce polemic about the advisability of rebuilding the city center in its historical form. The old ownership divisions were restored, abandoning the reconstruction of several frontages and reducing the depth of buildings for urban reasons. Simplified documentation of the adaptation was prepared regularly based on historical sources - photographs and drawings from the 17th and 18th centuries. (Gawlicki, 2012) Some of the past facade designs were recreated and moved from the streets of not-reconstructed streets into reconstruction plans of different locations (Stankiewicz, 1959). The interiors of the buildings were adapted to modern utility functions. The first residential project of the Main Town was considered a success, despite many shortcomings caused by the fast pace, the lack of relevant prior studies, and the combination of socialist building standards with conservation practice.



Figure 16.
Stone elements awaiting (often
random) assembly.

Figure 17.
Simplified elevation of the rebuilt
buildings by Ogarna street, 1949.



6. Rebuilding | Part three 1950-1960

Realization and changes

The Nationwide State Enterprise, with a Monument Conservation Workshop, was established in 1950, becoming responsible for all decisions taken. This resulted in the closure of the Gdańsk Conservation Workshop. (Bolduan, 1967) Also, it significantly complicated the Provincial Monuments Conservator's operations as the investor in several monuments' reconstruction, allowing solely to follow orders. In 1951 CBPiSBO ZOR and GDO ceased to exist. The new unit, "Miastoprojekt", was established within the Central Architectural and Construction Office. (Trojanowska, 1997) The limited activity of Gdańsk's conservators in the reconstruction process resulted in its systematic change of direction. Concepts regarding the implementation possibilities were continuously changing during the construction works.

Another reconstruction project started in 1952. The Royal Route (Długa and Długi Targ Street) was a route of exceptional urban, architectural, and historical value; hence more attention was focused on its reconstruction. However, the persuasive nature of socialist realism began to manifest itself there as the opponents of the reconstruction gained the sympathy of the authorities. (Friedrich, 2015) The reconstruction of the creative reconstruction was close to socialist realist design, which led to the creation of "pseudo monuments". The buildings were constructed contrary to the historical prototypes, juggling

with elements and details taken from the past. They had neither the value of a new architectural idea nor the scientific and historical value. (DB 29/30 XI 285) The two visions, historical and creative realization, clashed more and more, where in many cases, the "ideological" version was favored by centralized designing and investing bodies.

The implemented frontage designs became increasingly creative and inconsistent with the historical form, mixing various forms characteristic of previous eras. Often, the desire to give the frontages a superficial reference to the pre-war figures was expressed solely in dividing the facades with gables (inconsistent with the historical state or build-up line) and the orientation of the roof ridges perpendicular to the street. (Friedrich, 2001) Apart from the authorities' favor for a creative and modern (socialist realist) reconstruction version, financial matters impacted the reconstruction decisions. A paradoxical situation arose where an almost exclusive investor in Gdańsk - DBOR - had much money to reconstruct entire blocks of flats from the foundations and could not cover buildings requiring relatively small financial outlays for renewal or renovation. Additionally, no credits were granted to the conservator either, resulting in the poor reconstruction of non-existent tenement houses and an almost complete lack of interest in authentic, valuable monuments. (Stankiewicz, 1959)

One of the final projects, the Theater at Węglowy Square was recognized as the triumph of modernity and, at the same time, the greatest failure of the reconstruction of Gdańsk. The classicist building waited for work to start until 1956. Although classicism was the most widely accepted formal language of socialist realism identified with the Polish tradition, in Gdańsk, this period coincided with the beginning of Prussian rule. In this case, the historical proposal completely lost in competition with the postulates of socialist realism and gaining in popularity modernism.

However, the fascination with modernity that dominated in the late 1950s probably meant that the reconstruction of the "historic" Gdańsk ceased to excite the press and the inhabitants of Gdańsk. It was the beginning of the end of the reconstruction of historic Gdańsk. (Friedrich, 2001)



Figure 21.
The new building of the Wybrzeże
Theater built in 1956-1967.

Figure 18.
Building structure of the Main Town
before 1939



Figure 19.
Building structure of the Main Town
around 1959.

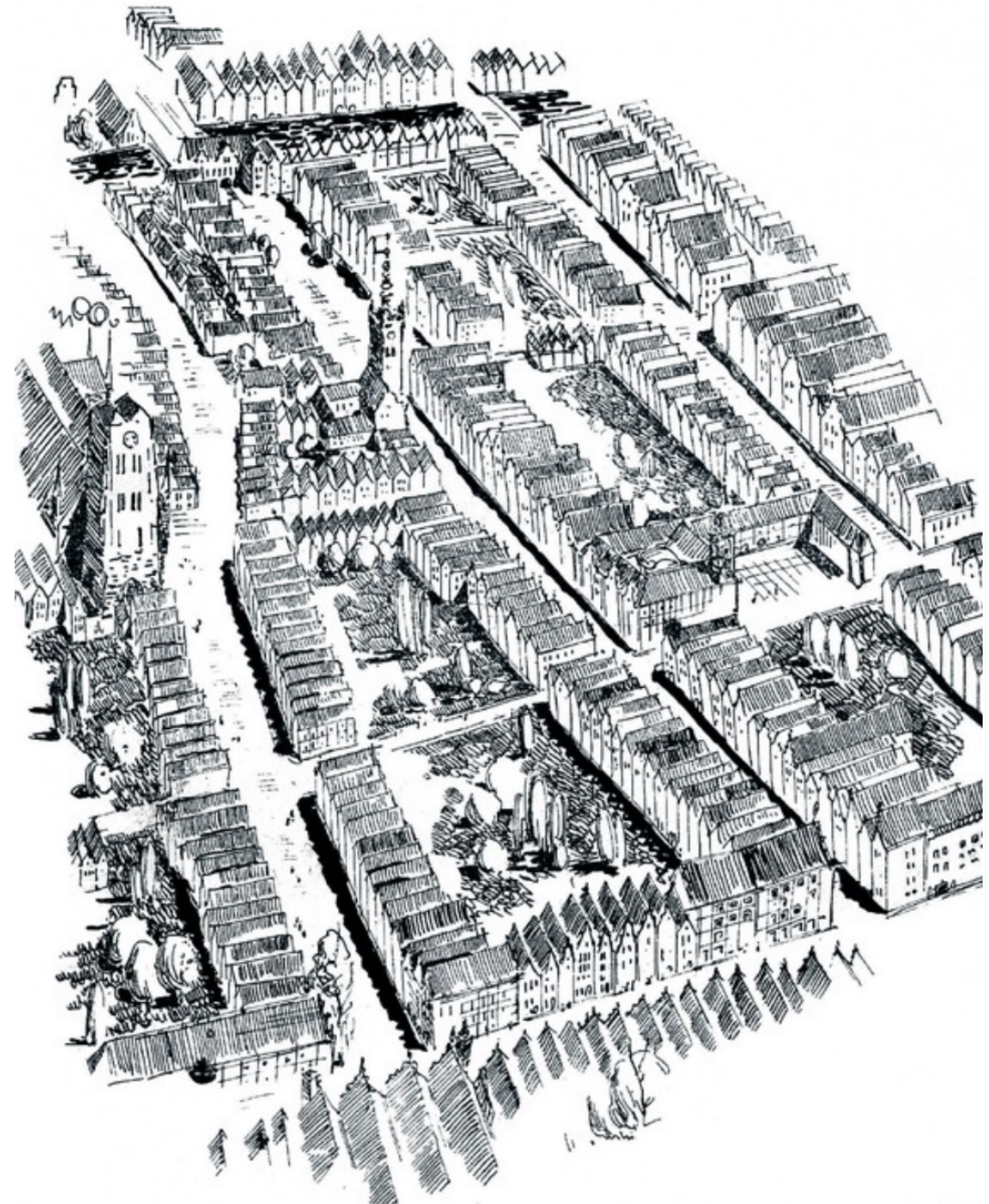


Figure 20.
Building structure of the Main Town
after the reconstruction around 1960.

1945

7. Voices of the reconstruction

"Gdansk is ours!"

"Corpse fumes haunted everywhere: on the street, in the church, over the depths of the Motława River overgrown with sheepskin. The putrid smell clung to clothes, stayed in hair, discouraged eating. Apparently, there were houses with tens, hundreds of corpses lying under them. There was talk of shelters flooded with water, where the population of the entire district perished."

"Infinite ruins, fetid burning and stench, countless large flies, clouded faces of rare Germans, and most importantly - this emptiness of deserted streets"

"The Germans were rushed to clear rubble and clean bricks. There was a general rule (...) that they should make up for the damage. They were malnourished and mostly women."

"The ruins were depressing and, in addition, the pessimists were constantly cawing that it could not be rebuilt at all"

Not a single German!"

"The city center of Gdańsk is rubble, ruins, ashes. But despite the destruction, the city did not lose its monumentality. Broken and mutilated, it proudly displays the remnants of its dignified splendor."

"In the first place, Warsaw, then ports: Gdańsk and Gdynia. At the moment both are dead."

"We do not want to reciprocate with crematoria or make soap from their bodies, but we only want their work."

"A social scourge. Venereal diseases."

1946

"Everywhere here they demolish and build; not so much the city itself, but also its new life. There is sometimes a certain guiding thought in this, but rather the biological law of community formation prevails. Nowhere today in Poland is there such intensity in the emergence of a new community."

"Some had no place to sleep, and how to occupy an abandoned house when a bomb stuck in the wall and it is not known whether it will explode soon"

"When they found out that I was a native of Gdańsk, they called me German."

In such a strong human wave, which flows smoothly from the Polish lands here towards the sea, dirt must also move. Never mind, it will not defile life, it will not hinder its development."

"The inhabitants of the barracks are in terrible mental conditions. Most of them were robbed on the way to Gdańsk. After arriving at the place, he cannot find a job or an apartment, in a word, he cannot find the conditions to settle down."

"The historic house was looted"

"destruction of German traces"

"We are already Gdańsk inhabitants, who came from various parts to live here and lay the foundations for the emerging maritime state with our work."

"they scare us with a Free City" - and the pavements of Gdańsk not only trample Polish feet but more: Gdańsk has already grown into Polish hearts."

"we are not here [...] new, strangers, today, we are here like the former owners of this land"

"Every word spoken loudly in German sounded to Poles like a shot from a gun."

"The homeland is alive"

"they scare us with a Free City" - and the pavements of Gdańsk not only trample Polish feet but more: Gdańsk has already grown into Polish hearts."

"In this plan, the place for the old historic Gdańsk was preserved. Therefore, what has been rebuilt will not be doomed to destruction, it will be able to testify to our past, as well as the ability to respect works of art - which is the common good of nations, and which was only slightly German here."

1947

"The charm of works is so irresistible that even in ruins they arouse admiration."

"The city is immortal. It was brought back to life by the work of our hands, but the source (...) was its eternal Polishness and its extraordinary beauty. It is the thousand-year history of Gdańsk that brought it back to life.."

"It is said that everything must be demolished and Gdańsk built anew. It's too hastily thought out. The monuments of Gdańsk belong not only to us, but also to the entire European culture."

"The old building plan meets modern requirements."

"Reconstruction dispute!"

"On the site of rubble, a representative district of a socialist city"

"Gdańsk's speeder. A stylish tenement house will be erected in the Old Town within 9 days"

"People will come downtown"

"New residents are coming to the city. ZOR is opening 630 new rooms for working people"

"The pace of works in old Gdańsk is impressive. New houses pop out of the ground, as if after a rain. Within a dozen or so days, the character of the street almost changes and a new, lush life grows on the tragic ruins of Gdańsk"

"a deep perspective (...) of the street closed with the Golden Gate, pleases the eyes of the inhabitants with its compact walls"

"We saw with our own eyes how a new house was built in 4 and a half days. Many still do not believe in the possibility of such achievements, but every day proves that it is a fact. The entire capitalist world cannot understand it. It is alien to our methods of work. foreign sources of our pace and self-sacrificing effort."

"Gdańsk will be a city of healthy and happy people"

"because you know that these houses will not be inhabited by shirkers, but by people just like me, working people"

"We used to live in one small room, I had no kitchen, no water, no gas"

"It's time to open shops and populate apartments"

"The former Royal Route will be a great hall of Gdańsk in the near future"

1948

1949

1950

8. Reflections and conclusion

The reconstruction of Gdańsk, particularly its most valuable historical part - the Main City- was complex. Many factors influenced this multifaceted process. The enormity of the destruction and the beginnings of the city's functioning under Polish rule naturally determined the course of reconstruction. What were the realities of reconstruction? Did the decisions made and the form of reconstruction of the Main City in its main period of reconstruction between 1945-1960 influence the rebuilding of the identity of the place?

The historic downtown area has been brought back to life but in a different form. The Main City was the only area of Gdańsk where attempts at comprehensive reconstruction were undertaken. However, the scale of changes is still massive in the case of the reconstruction of only a few of the most valuable monuments and the loss of almost all original residential buildings. In place of the demolished and dilapidated tenement houses, new ones referring in scale and partial reconstruction of facades to the previous architecture of Gdańsk were erected. The limited authentic historical substance was defined as a monument of reconstruction with a significant influence on the architecture of the 1950s.

The reconstruction carried out had to find a compromise on many levels. The only salvation for the monuments could be the speed and consistency of action, which, due to the scale of damage, fell into the background with the priorities of ensuring the place's basic functioning and improving the community's miserable living

conditions. Society faced hunger, cold, and epidemics and struggled to survive in the city's ruins. The first months were uncertain about how history would unfold and who would take over the government of previously German-dominated Gdańsk. The war left a significant mark, and the effects and fears everyone dealt with in their way. Then, the great migrations were paid for by the hardships and dangers of travel and the subsequent attempt to find oneself in a new place.

Subsequently, the lack of a unified leadership made the organization of activities insufficient and the activities dispersed. The rising of the city from ruin was not only about reconstructing the city's tissue but also creating its governance bodies from scratch, drawing new rules of functioning and constant exchange of society. The necessary departments dealing with various aspects of urban life were systematically created. In addition to reconstruction, these were administrative units, post offices, schools, hospitals, and universities.

One of the main priorities in the city and the country was the opening of the port, which brought the promise of development and economic stability. Coordinating the attack of many elements was an arduous task, especially given the centralized nature of the new political system.

In addition, the socialist system greatly regulated most activities undertaken collectively as a society and as individuals. Especially the period of Stalinism in the first post-war years turned into a time of total obedience to the communist idea threatened with persecution. The divergence of propaganda concepts also influenced the city's reconstruction process. The general unplanned implementation

of the reconstruction resulted in a continuous change of ideas and clashes between the supporters of historical and creative reconstruction. An additional strong aversion to the Germans transferred to the German cultural heritage significantly influenced the reconstruction decisions. The pain after the war of occupation was so intense that attempts were made to eliminate all possible traces of the harmful past. influenced the positive reception of the reconstruction, even with many

In conclusion, the reconstruction became a source of genuine pride for multiple generations of Gdańsk citizens. Therefore, one of the significant aspects of the crystallization of local identity in the post-war decades. Despite the discrepancies with the original historical form, it allowed for preserving the feeling of rebuilding the former splendor of Gdańsk and the birth of the city as a Polish one. In difficult post-war times, combined efforts to raise the representative, historic part of the city united the society, giving faith and hope for a better tomorrow. Most importantly, monumental buildings - churches, historical town buildings, and medieval fortifications- have dominated the city's cultural landscape. In contrast, eclectic buildings from the end of the 19th century were consistently eliminated. The residential function filled the urban tissue around the monuments, partly responding to urgent living needs, such as safe, uncrowded accommodation or work that provides a basic income. Addressing the necessities of life helped acclimate to the new place and start the process of getting used to it and building bonds with it. Most of the population living in post-war Gdańsk knew little about its previous form, which could have influenced the positive reception of the reconstruction, even with many discrepancy to the historical form and the creation of pseudo-monuments. The most important matter was to get rid of the post-German traces. Additionally, restored churches played a significant role, uniting all diverse groups and becoming the glue of society.

Main Town Gdańsk owes its post-war form to a handful of people who put a massive effort into the historical reconstruction of this part of the city, fighting for its cultural and historical heritage. An attempt to recreate selected most important buildings and the former urban tissue allowed for the creation of a picture, supplemented by the imagination that this is how Polish Gdańsk used to look like. In the demanding postwar situation, prioritization and compromises were inevitable, but it did not prevent and even helped to rebuild the city's new Polish identity.



Figure 22.
the Main Town Gdańsk nowadays.

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the Central Office of Projects and Studies of Housing Estate Construction ZOR (CBPiSBO ZOR) - Centralne Biuro Projektów i Studiów Budownictwa Osiedlowego

the Conservation Studio/Office - Pracownia Konserwatorska

the Council of Ministers - Ministerstwo

the Department of Culture and Art - Wydział Kultury i Sztuki

the Facility of Worker’s Settlements (ZOR) - Zakład Osiedli Robotniczych

the Gdańsk Reconstruction Directorate (GDO) - Gdańska Dyrekcja Odbudowy

the General Conservator of Monuments - Generalny Konserwator Zabytków

the General Directorate of Museums and Monuments Protection in Warsaw - Generalna Dyrekcja Muzeów i Ochrony Zabytków w Warszawie

the Government Delegation for Coastal Affairs - Delegatura Rządu dla Spraw Wybrzeża

the Head Directorate of Museums and Monument Protection (NDMiOZ) - Naczelna Dyrekcja Muzeów i Ochrony Zabytków

the Society of Friends of Science and Art - Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauki i Sztuki

the Ministry of Reconstruction - Ministerstwo Odbudowy

the Monument Conservation Workshop

the Municipal National Council - Miejska Rada Narodowa

the Nationwide State Enterprise - Ogólnopolskie Przedsiębiorstwo Państwowe

the Painting and Sculpture Conservation Studio - Konserwatorska Pracownia Obrazów i Rzeźby

the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) - Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza

the Provincial Monument Conservator in Gdańsk (WKZ) - Wojewódzki Konserwator Zabytków

the Spatial Development Plan for Part of the Old Town Districts (MPZPCDS) - Miejscowy Plan Zagospodarowania Miejscowego Części Dzielnic Staromiejskich

the Workers’ Housing Estates Construction Directorate (DBOR) - Dyrekcja Odbudowy Osiedli Robotniczych

the Voivodeship Office - Urząd Wojewódzki