

## Meeting *Modernisms* in Gdynia

**Robert Hirsch, Ana Maria Zahariade, Karol Giełdon**

PhD, Head of Municipal Office of Monuments Protection, Gdynia and Associate Professor, Gdansk University of Technology, Gdansk, Poland  
robert.hirsch@pg.edu.pl

PhD, Professor, "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, Romania  
zahariade.mail@gmail.com

Architect, Municipal Office of Monuments Protection, Gdynia, Poland

Gdynia is a particular place, where, in less than twenty years, political will and Modernism have transformed a small fishing village into a large modern seaport city – Poland’s “window to the world.” Although it was not the only modernist city built in Europe between the two World Wars,<sup>1</sup> Gdynia is exemplary for the “extent to which Modernism was assimilated and absorbed,” reaching a dominant position and determining the face of the city. This makes the city stand out from the rest of Poland.<sup>2</sup> In an incredible way, Gdynia’s architecture and planning resisted German occupation, the destructions of the war, successive demographic waves, political changes and the new post-1989 economic pressures. Its inhabitants – including investors, scholars and general public – succeeded in developing a strong community spirit around Modernism, giving rise to strategies of conservation that are carefully integrated into present and future urban policies. Nowadays, the white city of the 1930s became a vivid “platform for Modernism.”

This spirit secured the continuity of many architectural events, among which the International Scientific Conference *Modernism in Europe – Modernism in Gdynia* stands out as one of the most important in Poland and constitutes a timely occasion to periodically review the state of research on the modernist architectural development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to compare underlying contexts, and to learn about state-of-the-art approaches to its preservation, as well. The 7<sup>th</sup> edition took place in October 2019. On this occasion, professor Robert Hirsch, Head of Municipal Office of Monuments Protection in Gdynia, was kind to summarize for *SIITA* the unique and fast development of this Polish modernist icon – a city aspiring to having its urban core included in the World Heritage List.

### Gdynia and Its Modernism (Robert Hirsch)

One hundred years ago, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the development of the city and seaport of Gdynia was the result of the new political, social and economic condition following the Versailles Treaty. As part of the national endeavor to grow a mostly agricultural country into an industrialized, modern one, the 75 kilometers long Baltic coastline regained after the war was meant to become the beachhead for the development of Polish marine economy, while the small fishing village of Gdynia was chosen to become the main Polish harbor.<sup>3</sup> The analysis and

1 For instance, Zlín (in the Czech Republic) would be another example, but it was a private investment, in contrast with Gdynia.

2 Maciej Czerwiński, “Architecture in the Service of the Nation: The Exhibition ‘Architecture of Independence in Central Europe,’” <http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/poland/architecture-in-the-service-of-the-nation-the-exhibition-architecture-of-independence-in-central-europe/>, last accessed Oct 15, 2019.

3 Gdansk, with its large port, gained after World War I the status of a Free City under the protectorate of the League of Nations, remaining outside Polish borders. For centuries, Gdansk was an important port through which Poland was linked with overseas cities and countries, and the impossibility to freely use this port quickly led to the idea of building a new one alongside the Polish coast.



Fig. 1: View of the city and the port, 1933

the first design draft were prepared by engineer Tadeusz Wenda, who was also responsible for subsequent stages of design, and a special act was passed by the Parliament of Poland in 1922.

The construction of the seaport in a place devoid of any infrastructure was a serious enterprise, and was achieved in stages. The first one was the construction of a small temporary port with a little wood and stone pier for mooring ships. The inauguration ceremony took place in 1923, in the presence of the President of Poland.<sup>4</sup> This was also the year when the first foreign trading ship was berthed. The construction of the port accelerated significantly in 1926, when Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, considered as one of the creators and patrons of Gdynia, became Minister for Industry and Trade.

The port was initially intended to have an external part, with piers running into the sea (Fig. 1) and an inner port, with dug out port docks. The inner northern section was allocated to the Polish Navy, while the trading port was located on the southern side. The piers with the trans-shipment wharf, a fishing harbor and a passenger pier were located in the external port. The South Pier, freely accessible and running 600 meters into the sea, between 120 and 170 meters wide, was the most representative part of the port. The harbor for near-coastal transport and the basin for sports yachts and boats were built next to it, and modernist buildings were constructed here (Fig. 2). The South Pier was the representative culmination of the main central street running from the railway station to the sea.<sup>5</sup> In 1935, when the Gdynia seaport had been almost fully developed and equipped, it was among the biggest at the Baltic Sea.

4 In the initial stage of the construction of the wharf, wooden piling was used, later replaced with concrete structures. A special method was applied in building the wharf. Large, floatable concrete boxes, reaching even 10 meters in height and 18 meters in length, were constructed; once completed, the soil underneath them was removed and they were lowered to the water surface and towed to their intended location. Afterwards, the boxes were filled up with sand and stones to sink and settle on the bottom of the sea. The walls of the concrete tanks protruding from the water constituted the structure of the wharf. Thus, hundreds of meters of the piers in Gdynia port could be completed. Sławomir Kitowski, *Port Gdynia – 80 lat młodości / 80 years of youth* (Gdynia: Wydawnictwo Alter Ego, 2002), 24-29.

5 Sławomir Kitowski, *Gdynia – miasto z morza i marzeń [Gdynia – The City of Sea and Dreams]* (Gdynia: Wydawnictwo Sławomir Kitowski, 1997), 322-326.





Fig. 2: Gdynia Maritime Academy on the South Pier (built 1938-1939), 2017

The first manifestations of Modernism appeared in the late 1920s and the 1930s, in relation to the operation of the port, and were located next to the wharfs and on the piers, next to such port infrastructure as various stevedoring facilities. Many constructions were erected, in which numerous foreign and domestic maritime trade companies invested. These constructions included port administration buildings, customs services facilities, office space and a large number of structures for food processing, and storage of goods – cold stores and silos.<sup>6</sup> Since the decisive factor in designing these buildings was their function and economic efficiency, practically all of them were given modernist forms, frequently as a simple reinforced concrete structures with the commonly applied red brickwork. (Fig. 3)

The new expression also signaled the distancing from the former canon of the foreign occupants and symbolized Polish rebirth, as everywhere in the newly unified country. It took unique forms in buildings such as the Passenger Terminal, erected on the pier jutting out onto the sea, next to the entry into the inner port. It was inaugurated in 1933, in order to service sea passenger transport and to become the “gate” for those boarding ocean liners sailing to America. The building had a very modern structure and an exceptionally representative and elegant interior. Reinforced concrete walls supported the flattened, 7-centimetre thick, reinforced concrete barrel roofing constructed in accordance with the Zeiss-Dywidag system.<sup>7</sup> During the interwar period, the marine-styled hall of the Terminal was the stateliest interior of the city, hosting important events, holy masses, New Year celebrations, etc. Partly destroyed during World War II, the building regained its glory owing to its successful conversion into a museum. (Fig. 4)

Along with the port and its growing economic importance, a modern city was rising. When the site for the seaport was selected, the village had about 1,300 people; in 1926, when Gdynia was granted municipal rights, there were 12,000 residents and their number grew to 120,000 by the outbreak of World War II, in 1939. To meet this development, city planners Roman Feliński

6 Anna Orchowska-Smolińska, “Architektura i układ przestrzenny portu gdynińskiego lat międzywojennych jako dziedzictwo kulturowe” [“Architecture and spatial Layout of Gdynia Interwar Port as Culture Heritage”], (PhD diss., Gdansk University of Technology, 2013).

7 Orchowska-Smolińska, „Architektura i układ przestrzenny”, 125-129.







Fig. 3: Long-term storage facility in the port (built 1931-1934), 2012

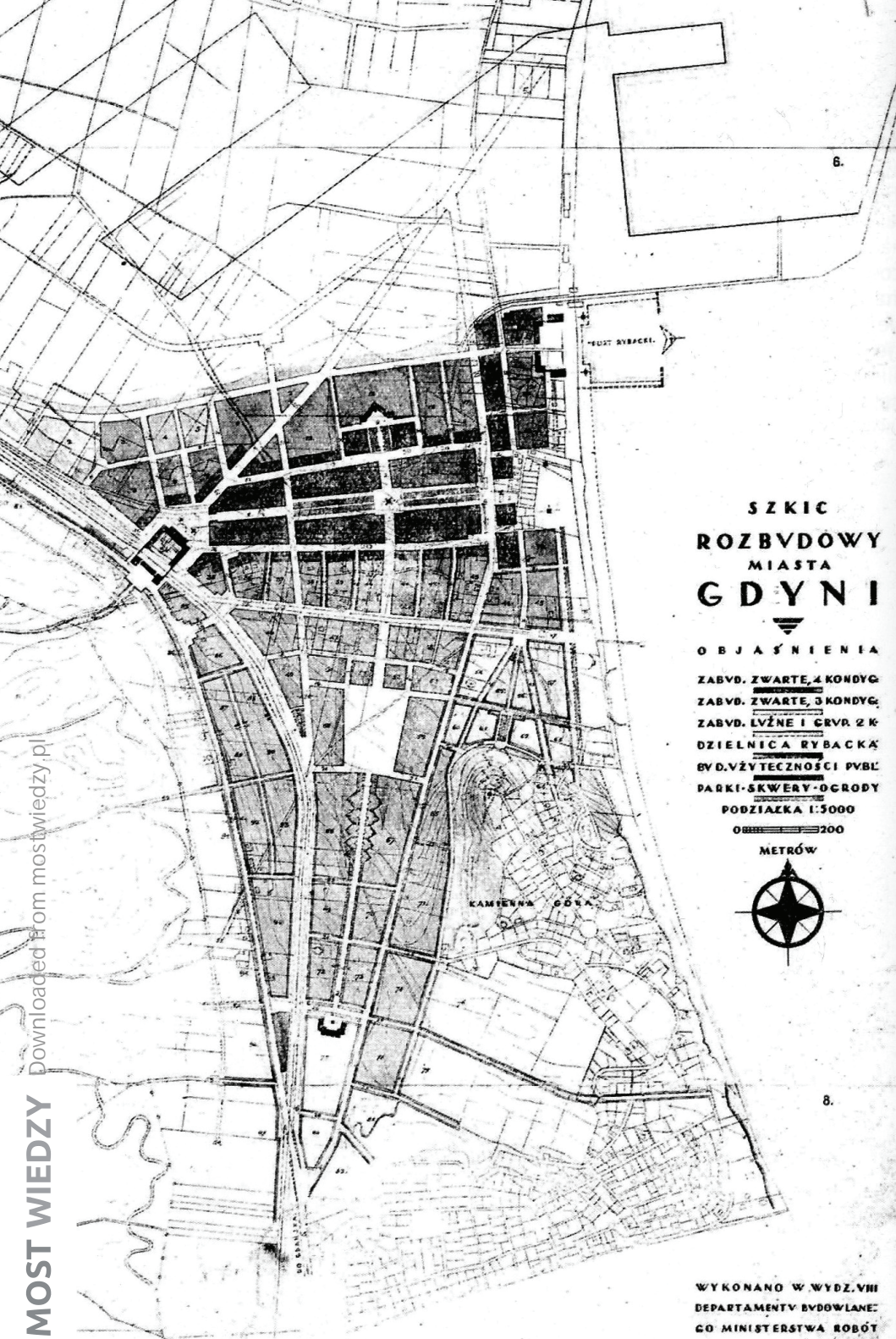
Fig. 4: Passenger Terminal (built 1932-1933), converted into the Museum of Emigration, the main hall, 2017

and Adam Kuncewicz worked between 1925 and 1926 to prepare a planning draft with districts located around the port. In 1926, the same planners designed a city center located south of the port, thus utilizing the convenient area between the sea and the tree covered moraine hills.<sup>8</sup> The city center was planned and grew on the site of the former village and its surrounding fields, neighboring the port and reaching to the sea. Two perpendicular streets – Świętojańska St., running parallel to the coastline, and 10 Lutego St., connecting the railway station to the sea – constituted the layout skeleton (Fig. 5), while Starowiejska St., parallel to 10 Lutego St., was for many years the high street of the village. However, the large, grand square adjacent to the sea, another important element of the plan, was never built.

8 Maria Sołtysik, *Gdynia miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Urbanistyka i architektura [Gdynia, an Interwar City. Urban Planning and Architecture]* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993), 97, 102.







**SZKIC  
ROZBUDOWY  
MIASTA  
GDYNI**

**OBJAŚNIENIA**

ZABUD. ZWARTY, 4 KONDYG.

ZABUD. ZWARTY, 3 KONDYG.

ZABUD. LĄŻNE I CEM. 2 K.

DZIELNICA RYBACKA

BYD. WZYT. TECZNOŚCI PVBŁ.

PARKI-SKWERY-OGRODY

PODZIAŁKA 1:5000

0 100 200

METRÓW



KAMIENNA GÓRA

6.

8.

WYKONANO W WYDZ. VII  
DEPARTAMENTY BUDOWLANEJ  
GO MINISTERSTWA ROBÓT



Fig. 5: First urban layout for Gdynia city center, 1926, designed by Roman Feliński and Adam Kunczewicz

The urban center was a large spatial development with wide streets, squares and buildings deployed in the form of rectangular quarters, including a large variety of building types intended to meet the requirements of the modern city. Consequently, in late 1920s and in the 1930s, a railway station, a courthouse, a city hall, a post office, trading halls, schools, hotels, banks, office buildings and a church were built. Among them, the office building of the Social Insurance Institution at 10 Lutego St. 24 became an icon of Polish architecture of the 1930s (Fig. 6), and the National Development Bank [Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego] (Fig. 7) still constitutes today a unique modernist achievement at national scale. Besides its modernist expression, the latter (designed by Stanisław Ziółowski and built between 1935 and 1939) is noticeable for its innovative wall structure,<sup>9</sup> and for the revolving windows of the staircases, similar to the auditorium windows of Bauhaus in Dessau.

At the same time, an intensive housing development was planned in their vicinity to house the dynamically growing population and to configure the center. They were to consist of maximum five stories above the ground, while in places of significance for the urban layout, e.g. at crossroads, six stories were allowed. More than 200 apartment buildings were erected in the 1930s for private owners, as, for example, the tenement houses at Skwer Kościuszki (Fig. 8) and at Starowiejska St. (Fig. 9).

Before the Second World War, Gdynia became famous not only for being an exemplary “white city” and an icon of the re-born Poland, but also for the speedy pace of building construction. “Construction sites progressed at ‘Gdynia speed’.” “I cannot recall any that lasted longer than a year and there were still record holders of only a few months,” wrote Włodzimierz Prochaska, one of the great architects of the city.

The outbreak of the Second World War (September 1, 1939) interrupted this fantastic development which covered about the half of the city center. According to a note written by a German occupant after invading Gdynia, the center of the city seemed like a large construction site suddenly deserted. Many construction works were stopped and numerous plots remained undeveloped. The city was not destroyed as a consequence of war operations, but the majority of the residents were expelled by the invaders who, in turn, took over the houses for military purposes as the port of Gdynia was needed as a military base. Subsequently, it became a strategic target to be bombed, and the last stages of the Second World War, and 1945 in particular, brought huge destructions and dramatically affected the port. However, owing to its modern layout with wide streets and to the structural and technical resilience of its buildings, the area neighboring the port survived the massive destruction and could generally be repaired.

After the Second World War, many of the pre-war residents returned and new ones arrived, especially due to the regeneration of the marine industry. Next to the repair works of many destroyed buildings, some others, whose construction was interrupted by the war, could now be completed, and new buildings, primarily intended to solve the overpopulation problem, were being erected.

In the city center, the free plots became new construction sites, this time built by associations and enterprises (according to the new political order), not by individual investors, often stripped of their property. A new type of a multi-family building with a few staircases and small

9 It was built using a reinforced concrete frame filled with brickwork, and the façade used light limestone panels from the south of Poland combined with aerated concrete. This innovative solution, patented in Poland, was based on the prefabrication of stone boards combined with a light aerated mass called *celolit*, a good thermal insulation material. These stone boards were applied onto the structure of the façade. Robert Hirsch, “Zespół mieszkaniowy przy ul. 3 Maja 27-31 w Gdyni. Wybitne dzieło architektury modernistycznej w Polsce i jego konserwacja” [“Residential Complex at No. 27-31 in 3 Maja Street. A Spectacular Achievement of Modernist Architecture in Poland”], in *Architektura XX wieku, jej ochrona i konserwacja w Gdyni i w Europie [20th Century Architecture, Its Protection and Conservation in Gdynia and in Europe]*, ed. Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, Robert Hirsch (Gdynia: Gdynia City Hall, 2018), 187-198.







Fig. 6: Social Insurance Institution office building (built 1934-1936), now, Gdynia Municipality Office, 2017  
Fig. 7: Polish Development Bank [Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego] residential building (1935-1939), 2017







Fig. 8: Tenement house, Skwer Kościuszki (left)

Fig. 9: Tenement house, Starowiejska St. (right)

apartments, erected on a few pre-war town-house merged plots became a common sight. Yet, these buildings fitted the scale of the modernist development of the 1930s and were largely adjusted to the former urban development plans. Thus, the city center succeeded to maintain its spatial consistency, despite the fact that a few residential buildings and a hotel of over a dozen floors, therefore largely deviating from the scale and character of the urban development adopted between wars, were built by the end of the 1960s and in the 1970s.

After 1990, the new epoch found its expression in new stunning public buildings that filled the spaces left empty by the previous developments. These projects resulted from architectural competitions and, though showing new architectural forms, they carefully took into consideration the character of the city. Multi-family apartment buildings of modern and distinctive architecture financed by private developers have also been erected, successfully using the commonly applied pattern of the compact townhouse, five or six stories high and with commercial areas on the ground floor, thus proving the validity of the solutions applied in the 1930s. Generally, the architecture of the 2010s is a creative interpretation of Gdynia's interwar architecture and perfectly fits the historical buildings of the neighborhood.

As anywhere else in the world, modernist architecture of Gdynia does not fit the traditional pattern of historical monuments, first of all due to its recentness, and also because its simple, undecorated forms are rather disregarded by the public. Yet, for the past several years, the modernist architecture of Gdynia has been the subject of extensive studies and scientific analyses, resulting in a growing interest in its preservation. First, the professional community recognized its value as early as 1972, when the first building of the Social Insurance Institution offices (Fig. 6) was listed as a historic monument, mainly for its symbolic significance as Gdynia flagship investment of the 1930s. Since then, many others from the 1930s but also from the 1950s and 1960s have been added to the list of protected monuments. But the simple listing is not enough if it is not doubled by public support.

The professional endeavor gradually gained the public support. In parallel with the first monographs of the city (published in 1993)<sup>10</sup>, architects, art historians, and city administrators have engaged in various activities meant to raise the public awareness concerning the quality of modernist architecture and the necessity of its proper conservation. These activities range from popular architectural publications and the marking of historical buildings and routes, to various events promoting the city's heritage (such as "Weekend with architecture"), public competitions, exhibitions and training for tourist guides, etc. These are long term preoccupations of the specialists and city managers, born from the conviction that the support of Gdynia's communities is the *sine-qua-non* condition for a sustainable preservation of the architectural heritage of the city.

It is also true that the social history of Gdynia helped establish affective relationships between the city and its people. Many of the present residents are the third-generation descendants of those who arrived here at its birth, when Poles from the three partitioned areas of previously occupied Poland came to Gdynia after the First World War. They directly experienced the city development, and many families preserve the live memory of its beginnings.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, many owners of buildings in Gdynia who survived the postwar exile and/or the communist ban to run their own property or business developed a particular sense of affection to their built environment when they regained their properties.

The gradual change of public attitude went hand in hand with the elaboration of solid and coherent strategies of protection and modernist heritage conservation, based on approaches similar to those regarding any older monument.<sup>12</sup> The modernist heritage in Gdynia, so significant for the development of the city and its everyday life, is today subject to protection on the one hand, while on the other hand, it is used to successfully meet the contemporary needs. Many ideas originating in the 1930s have found their nowadays follow-up and many historical solutions have been inspiring for the contemporary architecture.

Particularly meaningful for Gdynia and for Polish architecture is the City Centre as it was outlined during the interwar period and has been serving the same function to this day. This part of the city (except for the port) underwent the most spectacular transformation in 1920s and 1930s changing from the rural area to a large city district, with an overwhelming predominance of modernist buildings.<sup>13</sup> In 2007, the urban layout of the city center – an area of about 88 hectares, which includes about 450 buildings, many of them five or six stories high, inhabited

10 Maria Sołtysik, *Gdynia miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Urbanistyka i architektura* [Gdynia, an Interwar city. Urban Planning and Architecture] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993).

11 An interesting example is an enterprise initiated by the residents of the building of the Polish Development Bank, at no. 27-31 on 3 Maja St. From 2002 to 2014 the building was systematically subject to restoration works with significant contributions from the Gdynia communal fund. The restoration works contributed to sparking the interest of the residents of the building in artefacts. In 2009, a group of people (who initially were merely interested in the building and its history and later grew fascinated with it) started collecting memorabilia connected with the house and its residents. Thus, the building's chronicles were created and maintained, and old documents related to it started to be acquired. The original elements of the building's fittings and equipment were being gathered from those disassembled by the residents during redecoration works. This "collection" resulted in an exhibition of household objects and personal souvenirs shown in a few common rooms. This *Minimuseum*, an entirely independent social initiative, was formally inaugurated on February 9, 2009. A place of great historical and educational significance, this special building and its *Minimuseum* constitute a permanent attraction, and the majority of citizens express their understanding of the exceptional role of the building on the tourist map of the city. This unique initiative of the residents of has gained national fame and won prizes and distinctions. The *Minimuseum* is the effect of the cooperation of the local administration and the conservators of historical monuments with the community.

12 This includes the program of financial support for restoration provided to owners of historical monuments, particularly within the city centre. They may receive financial assistance between 30% and 75% of the restoration costs, and over a hundred buildings have benefited from the city budget co-funding.

13 However, one can still see single buildings of Gdynia's rural times and small boarding houses from the beginning of 20th century when summer tourists visited the place; as for example, the historical village house in Starowiejska St. (one of a few), and some historical villas – boarding houses dating back before the city was created (from the beginning of 20th century) at 10 Lutego St.



by a few thousand people, i.e. a significant part of the population – was listed in the Register of Monuments, meaning that it gained a high form of legal protection (Fig. 10).<sup>14</sup> The cultural value of the historical city center of Gdynia has been recognized also by being included in the group of the most important monuments in Poland, the so-called *Monuments of History*, a status granted by the President of the country. Gdynia City Centre was added to this elite group of the most valuable monuments, which included 105 entries in 2019. In 2019, the Government nominated Gdynia City Centre for the UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List.<sup>15</sup>

Gdynia's case clearly demonstrates that modernist architecture of the 1920s and 1930s has proved to be much more than just a clearly recognizable trend in the history of building construction. From many perspectives, this historical architecture appears to be universal and extremely functional, and continues to be the basis of the modern times we are living in.

Due to its past, i.e. an urban and architectural development of a fishing village into a modernist seaport-city, and to its present, i.e. a modernist heritage enjoyed, lived and cherished by its inhabitants as means of identity, it can be stated that Gdynia has a unique modernist ethos in Europe, which transformed the city in one of the most important centers of studies in Modernism in Poland. The International Scientific Conference *Modernism in Europe – Modernism in Gdynia* is only one of these dedicated commitments.

### Gdynia Meeting Other Modernisms (Ana Maria Zahariade and Karol Geldon)

Continuing the series started in 2007, the 7<sup>th</sup> edition of the International Scientific Conference *Modernism in Europe – Modernism in Gdynia* was held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2019, under the heading *20<sup>th</sup> century Architecture. Preservation of its Authenticity and Integrity*.<sup>16</sup>

The thirty speakers invited had the opportunity to meet in the transparent modernist ambiance of the Conference Centre of the PPNT Gdynia, where the Conference took place.<sup>17</sup> Among them, twenty-five were from Central and Eastern ex-Communist Europe (Estonia, Slovenia, Romania, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Ukraine), and five from Great Britain, Israel and Austria.<sup>18</sup> One could think that this geographical delineation was too regional and, consequently, too limitative. On the contrary, it was precisely this narrower contour that conferred the Conference a particularly focused character, allowing the participants to have deeper insights into the modernist developments of adjacent cultures that received almost concomitantly the same modernist seeds, to discern their differentiating formal overtones and local temporalities, to gauge the amplitude of their present problems, and to reflect over the various ways in which historiography recorded and interpreted them. At the same time, the geopolitical nearness and the awareness of a set of commonly shared issues helped dissolving the discreteness of the separate nationalisms and the segmented localisms that had characterized

14 Robert Hirsch, "Gdynia City Centre as a Historical Monument", in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Architecture Until the 1960s and its Preservation*, ed. Maria Jolanta Sołtyś, Robert Hirsch (Gdynia: Gdynia City Hall, 2015), 237-242.

15 Since September 2019, "Modernist Centre of Gdynia – the example of building an integrated community" is officially included in the Tentative List as one of Poland's proposals.

16 Organizer: City of Gdynia; Co-Organizer: Faculty of Architecture, Gdańsk University of Technology; Honorary Patronage: Minister of Culture and National Heritage Piotr Gliński; Patronage: DOCOMOMO International, National Heritage Board of Poland, Polish National Committee of International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS Poland).

17 PPNT – Pomeranian Science and Technology Park is located in a complex of buildings including historical ones, built in 1930s as a depot (garage) for public transport. The conference took place in a modern audience hall located in a new part of the complex (commissioned in 2013). The conference was accompanied by an exhibition of architectural details from Gdynia's houses, organized by the Municipal Office for Monuments Protection.

18 See the list of participants <https://www.gdynia.pl/zabytki/konferencja-modernizm-w-europie-modernizm-w-gdyni,7218/7th-international-scientific-conference-modernism-in-europe-modernism-in-gdynia,534807>, last accessed Nov 7, 2019.







Fig. 10: View of the city center, 2010

for a long while the Central and Eastern European modern developments, into a relaxed, almost familiar atmosphere. Yet, this “family air” was neither exclusive, nor did it betray signs of another self-absorption inside larger geo-cultural borders within which new frustrations were surreptitiously taking shape. Quite the opposite, the Gdynia Conference knew no borders, be they physical or mental, to impede the dialogue with the “mainstream”, and Modernism was never tackled in binary terms such as Western-Eastern, or center-periphery, but as a free place of “multiple plurals”, as Edward Denison (London) posited.

In Maria Todorova’s words, we can say that Gdynia Conference was about Modernism approached through the idea of “relative synchronicity within a *longue durée* framework of modernity”, an idea that does not exclude the existence of asynchronic developments, but allows their description “not simply in terms of linear consecutive phenomena, diffusion and one-way transmissions, but also, in some respects, as a process that emphasizes its dialogical nature.”<sup>19</sup> There were two days of professional exchanges of experience and expertise, driven by the mature understanding of the fact that modernity had differentiation in its core and constantly created *otherness* – an otherness whose specific problems were worth sharing and openly discussing.

This “otherness” was manifest in many ways, but in the first place through less known or newly studied instances of Modernism, as for example: the modernist architecture for Polish villages, presented by Malgorzata Rozbicka (Warsaw); the Tychy idea of prefabrication, shown by Anna Syska (Tychy); the concept of “growing house” and its projects in interwar Germany, of Jadwiga Urbanik (Wroclaw); the modernist gardens as part of the interwar houses, presented by Kinga Kimic (Warsaw); the “flagship wooden house project” of Bogdan Lachert and Jozef Szanajca in Komorow studied by Kojciech Baginski & Dorota Baginska & Kinga Kimic (Warsaw); the ideas about modernist tall office buildings and their impact in the paper of Krzysztof Bizio & Kamila Nowak (Szczecin).

<sup>19</sup> Maria Todorova, “Modernism,” in *Modernism: The Creation of Nation-States. Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe 1770–1945: Texts and Commentaries, volume III/1*, eds. Ahmet Ersoy, Maciej Górny and Vangelis Kechriotis (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010), 4-22.



In the second but not secondary place, it surfaced from the interpretations given to the notions of modernity and Modernism that underlaid all speeches that their use bears multiple nuances of difference, sometimes very subtle. For instance, when and how what we generically call Modernism / modernist architecture ends was a subjacent question present in the speeches of many participants. Piotr Marciniak (Poznan) and Petr Vorlik (Prague) put it in terms of inclusion of Polish Postmodernism, respectively of the Czech architecture of the 1980s, within Modernism, while Edward Denison framed it in the larger temporal periodization he proposed through identifying the dominant past and present drives of architectural development and its projection to the future, as e.g. sustainable development, considering the present and coming times as an *Anthropocene* – an era of the most influential impact of humans on the shape of environment. The issue was not theorized *per se*, although the concern underlaid many contributions, especially related to protection and conservation matters throughout the world. In a way, this reviewed the problem that interwar Modernism had to face a century ago (and still faces in some parts), namely its “recentness” – a feature which is not easy to bring in harmony with the traditional importance of the temporal criterion in the protection of heritage.

Similarly ambiguous was the issue of the stylistic features and limits of Modernism in formal terms. As it ensued from most presentations, the formal territory covered by Modernism turned out to be very wide, as wide as the discursive interpretations of the architecture built under the sign of modernity in these Central and East European countries. In simple terms, there was a largely embracing acceptance, including almost all architectural expressions called to answer the various challenges of modernization using modern building techniques; equally, in urban planning, both “ideological models,” progressist and culturalist (as identified by Françoise Choay), were endowed with similarly modernist potential. It can, however, be argued that this theoretical perspective in which meaning prevails over form, thus including a disturbing stylistic and ideological variety, entails a debatable relativity. But this is a highly interesting topic to be discussed in another meeting, in Gdynia or elsewhere.

The features of Modernism in formal terms were especially debated when connected with the concepts of authenticity and integrity under focus. Michael Turner (Jerusalem) offered the first insight in relation to the urban forms of the 20th century, and supported the idea of adaptive re-use attentive to preserving “the spirit of the place.” Other speakers substantially contributed to these issues: Marija Dremaite (Vilnius) highlighted the perceptual dimension of integrity through testing the concept of “Socmodernism 1 and 2” (as coined by David Crowley); Maria Jolanta Soltysik (Gdynia) tacked the integrity of the Port of Gdynia as decisive for the genesis of the city; Alexander Buriak & Maria Rusanova (Kharkiv) presented strategies for preserving the authenticity of the amazing Freedom Square in Kharkiv; Celina Łozowska & Robert Hirsch (Gdansk/Gdynia) referred to the integrity form-function relationship in the case of ZUS (Social Insurance Company) building complex in Gdynia on Partyzantow St.

As expected, most contributions addressed the matter of preservation and conservation of modernist architecture/environments, either subsequent to their focus on a particular topic, or dealt with as a problem in itself. They ranged from peculiar failures, as the story of the railway station in Katowice told by Aneta Borowik (Katowice), to more theoretical interrogations concerning the protection of modernist architecture, as asked by Vitte Janusauskaite (Vilnius) and Wolfgang Salcher (Viena), passing through matters of administrative tribulations concerning protection, as in the cases of the Warsaw and Mazovia railway stations, presented by Jakub Lewicki (Warsaw). More generally, all these contributions disclosed a substantial concern for the posterity of Modernism in various contexts, and for finding better ways to manage sustainably this heritage — a matter for which Jeremie Hoffmann (Tel-Aviv) expounded the methodology he works with, while the part of inhabitants in the management of modernist buildings was outlined by Waldemar Affelt (Gdynia).

Regardless the individual perspective, the approach to restoration and conservation arose from each speaker’s own experience with his/her Modernism or other’s Modernism. On the one hand, this helped avoiding usual clichés or professional stereotypes sometimes too frequent



in the history of Modernism. As an example, Ivo Hammer (Austria) literally colored in many nuances the “white boxes” of Modernism, while critically re-reading Hitchcock & Johnson. On the other hand, this kind of direct personal involvement infused the Conference with the character of a working-group, which is not a frequent dimension of such events.

Despite the nuances of difference and beyond the issues separately dealt with, the common denominator of the Conference was the readiness to dialogue. In this regard, certain contributors specifically emphasized the necessity of transferring knowledge across any conventional frontier, as for instance: Mart Kalm (Riga) who exemplified the necessity of comparatist studies, subtly deconstructing the idea of a monobloc Baltic Modernism, or Ana Maria Zahariade (Bucharest) who focused on the way she interrogated the Romanian interwar development after getting acquainted with Polish Modernism.

However, the intense interest generated by the deliberations “indoors” cannot be properly conveyed without mentioning the main contributor to the Conference: the host city itself. This is all the more important as, at the opening, the Mayor of Gdynia, Marek Stepa, announced that the city had just submitted the application for being included in the Tentative List of World Heritage.

In this respect, the visit of Gdynia that followed the Conference gave the participants the occasion to continue *in situ* their dialogue. This “outdoors conference” took place in certain key-places for the modernist heritage, and was guided by Robert Hirsch, Head of the Municipal Office of Monuments Protection. The places visited, documented and debated were: in the port, the cooling storage and a former Marine Station (where nowadays is located the Museum of Emigration); in the city, the Gdynia Maritime University with its recently restored audience hall, the Franciscan Monastery and the already mentioned ZUS (Social Insurance Company) Building Complex in Partyzantów St.

We are looking forward to reading the volume with the proceedings of the Conference, for the publication of which the Gdynia City Hall Municipal Conservation Office, joined forces with the Faculty of Architecture of the Gdańsk University of Technology.

#### ILLUSTRATION CREDITS:

Fig. 1: Photo from the archives of Gdynia City Museum.

Fig. 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9: Photos by Bartłomiej Ponikiewski.

Fig. 3: Photo by Robert Hirsch.

Fig. 5: *Architektura i Budownictwo* journal, 1926.

Fig. 10: Photo: Gdynia Municipality.

