

---

## MONUMENT OF HISTORY IN GDYNIA – PROBLEMS WITH PROTECTION OF THE MAIN REPRESENTATIVE AXIS OF THE CITY

---

SOŁTYSIK Maria Jolanta <sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> prof. dr inż. arch. Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, Department of History, Theory of Architecture and Monuments Conservation, Faculty of Architecture, Gdansk University of Technology  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0826-1734>

**ABSTRACT:** The Monument of History in Gdynia encompasses the part of the City Centre shaped in the interwar period, whose important part is the establishment of the South Pier together with the Yacht Harbour and John Paul II Avenue. The spatial idea of this complex was presented in 1938, in the project of the so-called Representative District, which is a very original realization of the scenic opening of the city to the port and the sea. Since this urban development was not completed in the interwar period, it is now under strong investment pressure, especially in the area of the sailing center. The current local plan (2009, amended in 2015) unfortunately allows for a compact way of development, contrary to the historical concept of a loose and open sea system. Although the establishment of the South Pier has been included in the register of monuments since 2007, the procedures for its protection have failed, as evidenced by the results of the architectural competition held in 2014. The solution that could protect us from planning errors should be a "conservation plan for the management of the Monument of History", modelled on similar plans for the management of objects included in the World Heritage List and preceding granting the status of the Monument of History.

**KEY WORDS:** Monument of History in Gdynia, South Pier, Representative District, local plan, management plan for the Monument of History

---

### Introduction

City Centre of Gdynia was included in the list of Monuments of History in February 2015, becoming the youngest Monument of History in Poland<sup>1</sup>. The protected complex includes a spatial layout from the 1920s and 1930s, constituting "a part of Gdynia downtown shaped

---

<sup>1</sup> Two years later, in March 2017, Radio station in Gliwice was entered on the list of Monuments of History. *Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland* (hereinafter referred to as JL) of 28 March 2017, item 654.

during the Interwar period"<sup>2</sup>. Earlier, in 2007, the complex was entered into the register of monuments, thus sanctioning the protection of architectural objects within its borders, which had been in place since the 1990s. It should be emphasized that as regards this protection, the city and conservation services achieved a great success, managing to have about 30 modernist objects entered into the register of monuments and over 110 in the municipal (local) register of monuments. However, certain problems are posed by the protection of the compositional values of a very important part of the complex - the protection of its main representative axis, including the establishment of the so-called South Pier, i.e. the southernmost harbor pier of Gdynia (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Southern Pier together with the Yacht Harbour is the southernmost port pier in Gdynia, designed for coastal and yacht sailing as well as for representative and recreational functions (photo: M. J. Sołtysik)

This area, unique in the spatial sense and one of the most frequented walking places in Gdynia, is nowadays heavily neglected in some areas, and plans for its future development raise justified concerns in the context of conservation.

### **Monument of History at the junction of the city and the sea - a unique modernist idea of Gdynia Representative District**

In the Decree of the President of the Republic of Poland of 2015 establishing the Gdynia Monument of History, a significant statement was included - the aim of protection is to preserve (...) "the unique urban layout created at the junction of the city and the sea, which is an

<sup>2</sup> Journal of Laws of 16 March 2015, item 356, par. 3.1.



outstanding achievement of Polish Modernism"<sup>3</sup>. There is no doubt that within the boundaries of the historic Downtown of Gdynia, the area that most tangibly creates the urban layout at the intersection of the city and the sea is the spatial arrangement of the South Pier with the Yacht Harbour and the John Paul II Avenue (the former Avenue of the United Polish Lands), located on the axis of the pier and at the same time on the extension of 10 Lutego Street and Kościuszko Square. This urban concept combines the city, port and sea into one spatial unit, introducing the urban structure into a specially constructed port pier, widely accessible to all residents and intended for coastal and yacht navigation. This solution was unprecedented in its compositional concept on both a Polish and European scale, as large ports and city centers usually constitute separate spatial arrangements, facing away from each other rather than coupled together. However, this original integration of the city and the port was the guiding idea of architects and urban planners designing Gdynia in the 1930s - a place where they intended to build a representative and representative port of Gdynia - a place where they planned to build a representative part of the newly created urban ensemble.

This idea gained its spatial shape in the arrangement of the so-called Representative District<sup>4</sup>, which was designed in the years 1932-1938. According to the concept finally adopted in June 1938 (Fig. 2), the main element of the District was the South Pier with the Yacht Harbour and the arrangement of a wide avenue along the axis of the Pier, leading to the Monument of the Union of Polish Lands located at its end. This avenue, founded on a grand scale, consisted of a wide square in the middle and two street axes on either side, which were accompanied by two one-sided rows of buildings - along the northern and southern shores of the pier. It is also characteristic that the buildings were not supposed to form a compact frontage, but a loose complex, open to the sea, allowing wide viewing openings both in the direction of the main axis and on both its sides.

---

<sup>3</sup> The full text of the Presidential Decree reads: Par. 1. "It is considered to be a historical monument Gdynia - historical urban layout of the city centre", located in Gdynia, in the Pomeranian Voivodeship. Par. 2 "In order to protect the monument to history mentioned in par. The aim of the protection of the monument is to preserve, due to its historical, artistic and scientific values, the unique urban layout created at the junction of the city with the sea, which is an outstanding achievement of Polish modernism, and due to its special role in the development of the country and the construction of Polish identity after regaining independence, it is considered a symbol of the Second Republic of Poland. It is a symbol of the Second Republic of Poland". Par. 3 "The area of the historical monument (...) includes the part of the centre of Gdynia, shaped during the interwar period (...)", op. cit. item 356.

<sup>4</sup> Sołtysik M. (1993). *Gdynia – miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Urbanistyka i architektura*. Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN (pp. 294-305 and 342-344); also see Sołtysik M. J., (2011). *Modernistyczne centrum miasta – ewolucja idei Dzielnicy Reprezentacyjnej Gdyni 1926-2007*. [in:] M. J. Sołtysik, R. Hirsch (Ed), *Architektura pierwszej połowy XX wieku i jej ochrona w Gdyni i w Europie* (pp. 51-62). Gdynia: Gdynia City Office 2011.

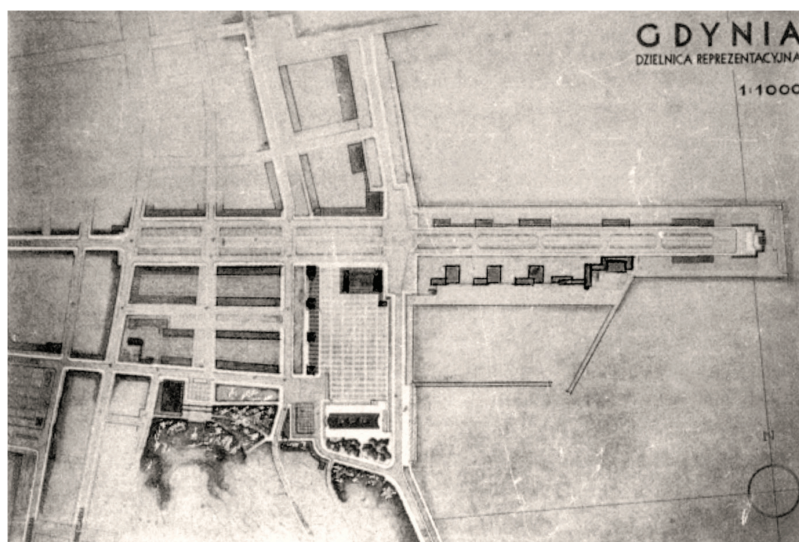


Fig. 2 The design of the Representative District in Gdynia from June 1938 by arch. Stanisław Filipkowski, whose main part is the Southern Pier together with the Polish Sailor's House and sailing pavilions (source: M. J. Sołtysik's private archive)

The Representative District concept has been largely implemented in its section regarding the South Pier<sup>5</sup>. The Pier and the Yacht Harbour (completed in 1936) as well as the Avenue of the Union of Polish Lands together with two buildings situated next to it - the Polish Sailor's House (now the Navigation Department of the Maritime University) and the Marine Station<sup>6</sup> (now the Marine Fisheries Institute), completed by the end of the 1930s, were very a consistent implementation of the main idea of the spatial composition, i.e. the exposure of the City Centre to the port and the sea. It was an extremely original urban layout, which through its unique landscape composition and open arrangement of loose, asymmetrical and height-differentiated buildings was a great example of the latest avant-garde modernist ideas in urban planning.

The South Pier complex is also avant-garde in its architectural dimension. The former Polish Sailor House (Fig. 3), which was well-designed and is now listed in the register of monuments, played the role of the dominant architectural feature of the complex. It was to house the main hotel and training center of the dynamically developing Polish maritime sailing in the interwar period. Its masterfully composed shape, asymmetrical, strongly dismembered and height-differentiated, is in its main body four-storey and five storey edifice, descending on both sides with side wings to the height of two storeys. The main accent of the composition was a dynamically outlined, oval avan-corps on the side of the yacht pool, emphasized by ribbon

<sup>5</sup> Due to the outbreak of war in 1939, unfortunately, it was not possible to start the construction of the so-called Marine Forum complex, i.e. the representative square at the base of the Southern Pier, which was also supposed to be a part of the Representative District.

<sup>6</sup> Located at the end of the pier next to the Sailor's House, the Marine Station was built in 1938 according to the design of Leonard Tomaszewski and Juliusz Żakowski and extended in 1969-1971 with a glass rotunda. Today it is the Gdynia Aquarium of the Maritime Fishery Institute.

windows and a roof crowning the fifth floor, stylized as a captain's bridge. The style of this project, reminiscent of a ship, remains one of the icons of Gdynia's modernism to this day. Next to it, the extension of the western wing of the Sailor's House was designed in the 1930s as a functional supplement and continuation of the maritime centre. Also in its architectural form, it was to be a continuation of the Sailor's House, consisting of three two-storey pavilions connected in the basement with columned porticoes. All these objects were formed into one coherent complex, in which the main spatial role was played by the Sailor's House, and the designed pavilions, significantly lower, were subordinated to this dominant feature.



Fig. 3 Former Polish Sailor's House, now the Navigation Faculty of the Maritime Academy in Gdynia, designed by Bohdan Damiński and Tadeusz Siczkowski in 1937, started in 1938-1939 and completed after 1945 (photo: M. J. Sołtysik)

The construction of the Sailor's House itself, which was carried out and well advanced between 1938 and 1939, was completed according to the original concept shortly after the war. Unfortunately, the construction of the sailing centre was not started before 1939 and it had to wait for its turn for more than 2 decades<sup>7</sup>.

### **Post-war buildings at the Yacht Harbour**

In the first post-war years, the port of Gdynia, destroyed by the Germans, was intensively rebuilt, including the blown-up embankments of the Yacht Harbour. After the restoration of its original shape, the decoration of the Sailor House was completed. Shortly afterwards, however, the functional purpose of the building changed and the functional division of the entire area at the Yacht Harbour was introduced. One of the faculties of the State Maritime School (now the

<sup>7</sup> In the 1970s, the South Pier was also built on the northern side of the South Pier - a coastal shipping station ("Gdańska Sailing Station"), designed by the famous architect Lech Zaleski. It was erected on the site of a provisional pre-war marina of "Żegluga Polskiej S.A."

Maritime University) - the Faculty of Navigation - was transferred to the former Sailor House, which practically excluded the facility from public use, separating it from the planned sailing center. The decision to build sailing pavilions was made at the beginning of the 1970s. At that time, there was still vivid memory of the concept of spatial planning of the South Pier and opening the view from its buildings to the Yacht Harbour, dating back to the interwar period. Undoubtedly, it became an inspiration for the designers of the new sailing center, who shaped the new development in a loose, non-intensive way, referring to the original concept of the Representative District. In the 1970s, four low pavilions, one- and two-storey high, were built here, connected by a series of single-storey floor hangars partially embedded in the ground, with viewing terraces on the roofs, which could be accessed from the main avenue (Fig. 4). The complex was well integrated into the whole development, creating a "landscape" architecture that allowed for open sea views through public viewing terraces. In this sense, the avant-garde idea of the interwar period was to a certain extent realized in this project.

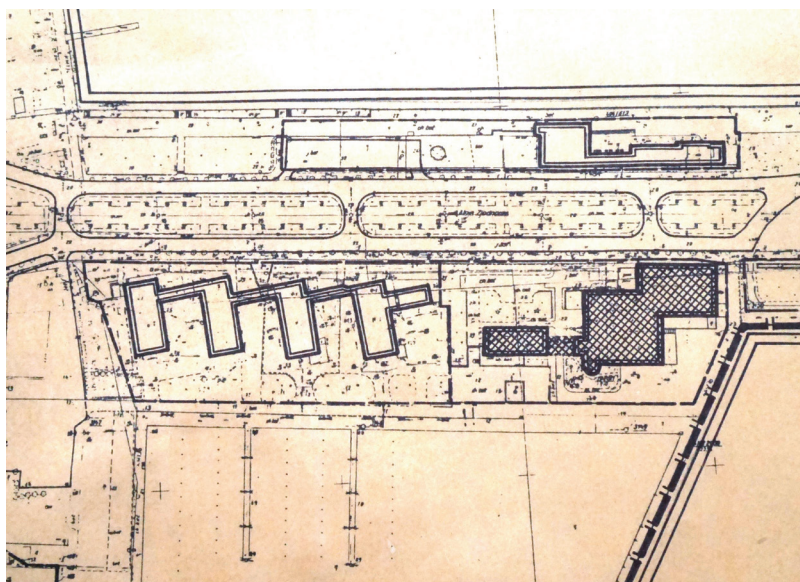


Fig. 4 Arrangement of development of a sailing center at the Yacht Swimming Pool in 1994. We can see four one- and two-storey sailing pavilions built in the 1970s, connected with each other by a series of one-storey hangars partially embedded in the ground, with observation terraces on the roofs, which could be accessed from the main alley. The sailing pavilions are functionally separated from the former Polish Sailor's House and now the Faculty of Navigation of the Maritime Academy (source: M. J. Sołtysik's private archive)

However, there were also changes in relation to the interwar projects. Individual pavilions were set up diagonally in relation to the street line, which was to optically reduce the length of their fronts and create a more spatially diversified solution. Moreover, the modest, post-war modernist architecture of the new buildings, on the one hand, clearly differed from the articulation of the former Sailor House, but on the other hand, it maintained its spatial domination in the ensemble and proper height relations. In general, therefore, this solution did not depreciate

the values of the historical layout. In its general outline, it has survived to this day, although the spatial condition of the sailing pavilions has been constantly degrading since the late 1990s.

### **The current development of the South Pier**

The existing development of the South Pier is a region of a glaring spatial conflict, where order in many places gives way to chaos. While the line of the square running in the middle of John Paul II Avenue is usually well maintained, nicely illuminated and tidied up, the area of the sailing centre leaves much to be desired in this respect. The former Sailor House itself - as a registered monument and Gdynia's icon of modernism - has recently been beautifully renovated and exposed. However, from the post-war years until today it has been used as a school building as a Faculty of Navigation of the Maritime University and is not a part of a complex of sailing pavilions. The latter, as well as the whole area by the Yacht Basin, is a very neglected area in the spatial sense.

This chaos is mostly the result of faulty spatial changes introduced here in the post-war period. The functional division established after the war turned out to be very unfavorable because it deprived the sailing complex of its natural center, which was supposed to be the Sailor House. The unfavorable situation is aggravated by the fact that the utility program of the existing sailing pavilions was not adjusted to the current needs. This is particularly true of the lack of catering facilities, which is necessary in such an attractive area as the South Pier, which is one of the main recreational routes of the Gdynia Downtown. Paradoxically, on the one hand, there is a lack of catering services in this development, and on the other hand, the existing viewing terraces remain almost entirely unused. On the other hand, long rows of shoddy makeshift fast-food outlets and stalls have been placed there, which are a boarded-up eyesore in winter and equally hideous sight in summer. In addition, the pavilions of sailing clubs are unrenovated, technically ageing, and since the 1990s they have been covered with advertising, rebuilt and spatially degraded. Unfortunately, in the summer season, even a sequence of green pedestrian squares in the middle of the John Paul II Avenue, which is usually tidy, is experiencing a real invasion of more or less temporary objects – merchandise displays, advertisements and café shacks. At the end of the South Pier, in place of the spatial culmination of the layout, there is a large car park with an uneven and unsightly surface, which additionally introduces chaos in the area.

### **Local spatial development projects and the "New Marina in Gdynia" competition (2009-2015)**

Some hopes for bringing order to the space of the former Representative District of Gdynia were connected with the new local spatial development plan. In 2009, i.e. two years after the City Centre was entered in the register of monuments, this plan was actually adopted<sup>8</sup>. However, its provisions in the part concerning the South Pier and the sailing center turned out to be

---

<sup>8</sup> Resolution No. XXXVII/839/09 of Gdynia City Council of 25 November 2009 on the adoption of the local spatial development plan for the part of the Downtown district in Gdynia, the region of Kościuszko Square, Jana z Kolna street and 10 February street. *Official Journal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship* (hereinafter referred to as *Dz. Urz. Woj. Pom.*) of 27 January 2010, No. 12, item 220.

controversial and improperly understood the issue of protection of the historic system. In fact, the map of land section no. 47, covering the area of this center, provides for a large complex of new, four-storey buildings up to 15 meters high, in place of the existing sailing pavilions. A long 190-meter high frontage along John Paul II Avenue, closed by a very large urban housing block of 190 by 60 meters<sup>9</sup>, was designated for it. At the same time, referring to the need to protect the cultural heritage, the plan recommended a method of shaping the new buildings, which - paradoxically - stands in clear contradiction to the historical urban concept of the South Pier. It stated that in this area "it is required that the height of the buildings designed in dense frontages be related to the "existing neighboring buildings"<sup>10</sup>. First of all, the provision stated that for this part of the South Pier, dense and frontage development were planned, without reference to the loose arrangement with side view openings which was the essence of the historic complex planning. Secondly, the plan recommended that the height of the new building should be related to the neighbouring former Sailor House, without paying attention to the fact that in the historic complex the building played the role of the high dominant feature and that the sailing pavilions were to be significantly lower than it. Both these historical composition principles of shaping the South Pier buildings were not taken into account in the plan, which is a clear mistake of the spatial policy of the city and its urban services. Unfortunately, it should be mentioned at this point that the findings of the plan were fully approved by the conservation authority, i.e. the Pomeranian Voivodship Conservator of Historical Monuments.

A blatant illustration of the spatial effects of such formulated planning records were the results of the architectural competition for "New Marina in Gdynia" announced in 2014. All the competition entries showed clearly that the long four-storey frontage along John Paul II Avenue, designed in accordance with these provisions, is a complete mistake and does not fit the landscape of the Southern Pier at all. It is too monumental and does not give a visual connection between the Avenue and the Yacht Harbour, which was the main urban idea of the historic complex. Both the runners-up (Fig. 5) and the design that won the first prize and was to be implemented, clearly demonstrate that the scale of the newly designed ensemble is much too large. It often exceeds the volume of the historic Sailor House, overwhelming it with its size, and the new architecture does not take into account the spatial context of this icon of Gdynia's modernism.

<sup>9</sup> See the drawing of the plan constituting a graphic annex to Resolution No. XXXVII/839/09 of the Gdynia City Council of 25 November 2009, *ibidem*, and the text of the land map No. 47 of that plan. The first floor was closed with an urban block of 200 m in length and 70 m in width.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. point 5 of the land map no. 47 and referred to therein as the binding provision of paragraph 5.1.2.b of the adopted local development plan (Resolution no. XXXVII/839/09 of the Gdynia City Council of 25 November 2009..., *op. cit.*). The exact wording of the aforementioned point 2b of paragraph 5 reads: "new buildings should be adjusted by a scale to the existing neighbouring buildings, it is required to establish the height of buildings designed in compact frontages to the cornice level, attic of existing buildings - exceptions to this rule are permitted if the height of the existing, adjacent building deviates by more than 1 storey from the permissible height in the given frontage of the buildings, established in the area card. Since the existing building in this area has two floors and the permissible new building has four floors, the recommended height reference is the four-storey building adjacent to the former Sailor's House.





Fortunately, so far the construction of the new Gdynia architecture giant has not taken place. However, the above-mentioned provisions of the local spatial development plan are still in force, as they were maintained in the amendment to the plan introduced at the end of 2015<sup>11</sup> and can be implemented at any time. Paradoxically, this change consisted only in a further increase in the permissible building height in this area - from 15 metres to 18.45 metres - and in an increase in the permissible building intensity up to 2.1<sup>12</sup>. It is significant that it took place in December 2015, i.e. after the Downtown of Gdynia and the South Pier were granted the status of the Monument of History. It can be seen that this additional award had little tangible impact on the proper protection of the urban complex.

It should also be emphasized that the current local development plan does not formulate any indications concerning the temporary development of the entire area of the South Pier – shoddy gastronomy outlets and various advertising and exhibition installations - which is being developed on a massive scale in the entire area of the South Pier. These objects, theoretically temporary, are still unpleasant, daily reality of the area.



Fig. 5 One of the four entries for the "Nowa Marina in Gdynia" closed competition from 2014, clearly showing that the long, 190-metre four-storey frontage along Jana Pawła II Avenue, designed in accordance with the current local plan of the area, is a complete mistake and does not fit the landscape layout of the Southern Pier (photo: M.J. Sołtysik)

<sup>11</sup> Resolution No. XV/315/15 of Gdynia City Council of 30 December 2015 on amending the local spatial development plan for the part of the Downtown district in Gdynia, the area of Kościuszki Square and Jana z Kolna Street and 10 Lutego Street. *Dz. Urz. Woj. Pom.* of 27 January 2016, item 270.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, par. 2

**The conservation specificity of the South Pier and the weakness of the existing protection procedures**

A question should be asked why such planning mistakes were possible in this area, which was protected by both the entry in the register of monuments and the distinguished status of the Monument of History. Why did plans contrary to the historical idea of this urban composition gain acceptance of conservation factors? Why did the existing procedures fail? Looking for an answer to these questions, first of all, it should be noted that the South Pier as a subject of protection has its clear specificity. Firstly, it is a complex which on the one hand is a part of the protected urban layout of the City Centre, and on the other hand, a complex whose artistic values are determined by a composition idea other than that of the City Centre as a whole - a relationship with the sea and the landscape. While in the center of Gdynia the compositional principle was tall, compact and frontage buildings, on the South Pier the opposite is true - loose buildings with vantage points and predominance of green areas, lower, diversified in height and subordinated to certain dominant features. Planning and conservation procedures ignored this specific composition of the South Pier and its relation to the landscape. The second important issue determining the specificity of the South Pier conservation is the fact that the complex was not completed in the interwar period, and both the entry in the register of historical monuments and the regulation granting it the status of a Monument of History clearly refer to the interwar period. In a way, it is obvious that the area not completely filled with the buildings from the 1920s and 1930s will be poorly protected and susceptible to development pressure, as well as to any additions and extensions. The weakness of the existing conservation procedures in this case was determined by the combination of the two circumstances mentioned above: (1) ineffective protection of the main compositional idea of the spatial layout, other than that of the remaining part of the Downtown district; (2) investment pressure on the area free of historical buildings. The existing protection procedures could not effectively cope with this specific situation. They are carried out on the basis of documents which, as a rule, either do not refer to these issues at all or do so in a very general and imprecise manner. They also do not refer to possible investment activities in the protected area. Therefore, new legal solutions in protection procedures are urgently needed.

**Conclusion – a need for conservation management plan for a Monument of History**

In the Polish practice of protecting historic buildings, especially those that are Monuments of History, there is no procedure that would include rules of conservation, specifically dedicated to this particular object. A proper solution could be a management plan for the Monument of History (or more broadly - a management plan for a historical building). An example could be similar plans of management of objects included in the World Heritage List "World Heritage List" (Plan of Monument Management). The preparation of a conservation management plan should not be a consequence of each act of recognition as a Monument of History, but its indispensable condition. It would have to be prepared in advance, perhaps even at the stage of entry into the register of monuments. It should contain detailed indications for the protection of the object, also in the context of possible future investment activities and the provisions of the



local spatial development plan. It must be in a form of a legally binding document and belong to the scope of activities of conservation services. It cannot be left entirely to the owner of the object and the future investor, because the current practice of carrying out renovation plans or historical and conservation studies of historic buildings by this legal entity does not fulfil its protective role properly, is usually not objective enough and is subordinated to short-term, particular interests of developers. The Monument of History Management Plan is necessary especially in case of large building ensembles with different composition structure, different for particular historical-spatial units. The case of the South Pier in Gdynia presented above is only an illustration and an example of a broader conservation problem concerning the protection of historical monuments on a national scale.

## Bibliography

*Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland* of 16 March 2015, item 356 and of 28 March 2017, item 654.

Sołtysik M., (1993). *Gdynia – miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Urbanistyka i architektura*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN (pp. 294-305 and 342-344).

Sołtysik M. J., (2011). *Modernistyczne centrum miasta – ewolucja idei Dzielnicy Reprezentacyjnej Gdyni 1926-2007*. [in:] M. J. Sołtysik, R. Hirsch (Ed), *Architektura pierwszej połowy XX wieku i jej ochrona w Gdyni i w Europie* (pp. 51-62). Gdynia: Urząd Miasta Gdyni 2011.

*Resolution No. XXXVII/839/09 of the Gdynia City Council of 25 November 2009 on adopting a local spatial development plan for the part of the Śródmieście district in Gdynia, the area of Kościuszko Square and Jan z Kolna Street and 10 February Street. Official Journal of the Pomorskie Voivodeship (hereinafter referred to as Dz. Urz. Woj. Pom.) of 27 January 2010, No. 12, item 220.*

*Resolution No. XV/315/15 of the Gdynia City Council of 30 December 2015 on amending the local spatial development plan for the part of the Śródmieście district in Gdynia, the area of Kościuszko Square, Jana z Kolna and 10 Lutego Streets, Dz. Urz. Woj. Pom. of 27 January 2016, item 270.*

