Article

Where the Second World War in Europe Broke Out: The Landscape History of Westerplatte, Gdańsk/Danzig

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Abstract: The article describes the landscape history of the Westerplatte Peninsula in Gdańsk (Poland) from the 17th to the 20th century presented as a complex process of the landscape's environmental, urban and military transformations. Westerplatte is known as the symbolic place where the Second World War in Europe broke out, and for this reason the current discourse is mainly concentrated on that period. Nonetheless, the history of Westerplatte includes many other important events involving Polish, German, Russian and even French politics over the last three centuries. Thanks to its location at the entrance of one of the main harbours on the Baltic Sea, it is cartographically the best-documented part of the Vistula river estuary. A comprehensive archival survey conducted in the Polish and German archives and cartographical analysis of over 200 selected historical maps allowed the authors to reconstruct its spatial history over three centuries. This case study of Westerplatte can be regarded as an example of the research modus operandi of a historical landscape which has been transformed multiple times. It might form the basis for establishing a new policy for its preservation, allowing a balance to be kept between fluctuations of the current historical politics and more universal requirements for the protection of tangible and intangible heritage. The article also stresses the importance of a holistic and interdisciplinary approach in the analysis of a historical landscape and the necessity of proper selection and critical verification of sources.

Keywords: HUL; cultural landscape; anthropopression; landscape transformation; heritage conservation; spatial history; the Second World War; coast; Baltic Sea; Gdansk

1. Introduction

The history of Westerplatte—a peninsula between the old Vistula mouth (current port canal) and the Gulf of Gdansk—began over three hundred years ago. The event that gave this place a unique status in Polish historiography as a symbolic place where World War II broke out was the dramatic defence of the Polish outpost at Westerplatte in the first days of the war. On this basis, the Westerplatte peninsula was awarded the status of the Monument of History—the highest form of monument protection in Poland, covering slightly more than 100 objects of outstanding importance to the cultural heritage of Poland. Thus, it was the subject of several historical elaborations on the margin of the synthesis of World War II [1] as well as studies on Gdansk [2] and a particular monograph on the Polish military base [3–7], which emphasized its importance in this context [8]. However, the history and the spatial transformations of Westerplatte are more complicated, and they encompass geographical, political and economic issues tangled together in a small area which often seems to be overlooked or treated superficially in contemporary literature [Figure 1].

The aim of this article is to reconstruct the spatial history of Westerplatte over the last 400 years. Analysing data onvarious characteristics from such a long period enables the combination of different methods (including tedious, traditional analysis of sources) in research on landscape transformations, depending on the chronological and territorial scope of the study area.

Figure 1. Location of the research topic: Gdańsk as a historical port city at the mouth of the Vistula river.

Literature Review

In the increasingly popular study of landscape evolution, possible perspectives refer to various scientific disciplines: geography, spatial management and urban planning, but also archaeology and architecture. Most recent studies on the geomorphology of anthropocenic landscape transformation focus on the scale 100:000–10:000 [9–11]. Meanwhile, spaces such as Westerplatte need more detailed analyses, taking into account the limited area of their multitemporal transformations. For this reason, the literature review is divided according to the subjects of interest: battlefields, urban (suburban) areas, coastline formation and estuaries. It is worth emphasizing that all these issues, usually related to analyses at various scales, appear in the analysed example of Westerplatte.

Battlefield studies are currently a developing field of research on historical landscape evolution. Studies of this type have recently been published concerning Austerlitz [12], Verdun [13], Cabezo de Alcalá [14] and Flanders [15]. They were most often focused on archaeological research and artefacts discovered during them [16], as well as the use of new research technologies such as photogrammetry and LiDAR [13,17,18]. A broader view, including changes in land cover and landform, also for understandable reasons, oscillates around one particular event in the history of the studied area [12]. However, historical events such as battles are violent and brief actions; therefore, their analysis allows us to reconstruct the landscape only at this specific point in time. This has been pointed out, for example, by W. Altizer in the context of research on the Santiago Campaign of 1898, based on the theory of "time perspectivism" by G. Bailey [19].

A particular problem is built environment analysis (urban studies), where changes have continuous character and the landscape, formed as a result of anthropopression and environmental changes, is still undergoing transformation. Historical Urban Landscapes (HULs) are the subject of research on conservation and heritage preservation issues. The idea

of conservation—keeping the monument in the best possible condition—cannot be applied as rigorously in the case of HULs as it can in the case of individual objects [20–22]. For this reason, awareness of the change and documenting it as a process is of value in itself.

Although attempts to map the process of historical spatial transformations of urban areas have been carried out in heritage studies of Venice [23,24], Naples [25], New York [26], London [27], San Francisco [28] and Tokyo [29], the analysis was still usually limited to the particular time due to the representativeness of the sources. The extensiveproject aimed at analysing historical transformation—"European Atlas of Historic Cities"—has been conducted for over five decades and is still far from complete [30].

Rivers and waterways in the pre-industrial era constituted the transportation network. Not surprisingly, studies of these, especially of the alluvial zones (estuaries), are also the subject of research by landscape historians [31,32]. Studies on formation processes and geological changes have also been conducted for the Vistula estuary [33,34]; however, the complex analysis of historical written sources and archaeological surveys was not implemented. This article presents the history of the formation of the Vistula estuary in the modern era since the end of the 17th century.

When the landscape and spatial transformations are analysed in architectural, urban or geographical terms, depending on the size of the researched object, it is quite rare, and it is difficult to combine the methods used for each of the three scales as each of them applies different solutions [35]. However, the role of historical cartography in such research might be illustrated by the history of Bombay [36]. It shows that combining interdisciplinary sources allows one to overcome the limitations of a particular scientific discipline and might help analyse other cases [37]. As it appears, one of the main problems for historians, archaeologists or geographers [31,33,34,38] dealing with the study of historical space, which can greatly limit the scope of research, is access to sources, as well as environmental changes, both natural and man-made, irreversibly destroying the object of the study itself.

The conditions that the authors encountered in the case of Westerplatte fall between the study of the urban landscape and the natural one, marked by human activity. These two trends in research on historical space may meet during the analysis of the urban environment exposed to several natural, economic and military changes. Westerplatte is an excellent example of such a place.

In recent years, discourse on the history of Westerplatte became strongly linked with its conservation and heritage protection issues [7]. The future development of the peninsula is widely disputed, and two main strategies might be observed. On the one hand, some heritage conservators propose reconstructing the former military base space as it was in the summer of 1939 (just before World War II broke out). On the other hand, local politicians and architectural societies would like to create a modern museum on the periphery of the peninsula with full respect to the monument's unhistorical conception from the 1960s. A half-century later, that vision reflected the political struggle between the local municipality and the new directorship of the Museum of the Second World War [39,40].

However, both visions do not consider the complex history of Westerplatte with its numerous transformations and links to three centuries of rough relationships between Poland, Germany, Russia and even France. Therefore, the analysis presented below contributes to the discourse on the future of this significant area and allows us to question how the cultural landscape should be protected today. Therefore, the authors proposed the analysis based on defining nine periods of the area's history, from the end of the 17th century to the turn of the 21st century. Their purpose is to present the way that in-depth interdisciplinary studies enable a better understanding of the past and how the complex database of cartographical sources, compared with archaeological surveys, might be used in reconstructing the whole process of spatial transformation in a strictly defined area. The theoretical base for such studies was set by the so-called spatial turn in history, which has been evolving since the late 1980s [41–43].

2. Methods

The reconstruction of the space of Westerplatte required the application of historical methods (analysis and criticism of historical sources, deductive and retrogressive methods) and field studies (archaeological, inventory of landscape on an urban scale), supplemented by the results of geomorphological (geological history of the Vistula estuary) and geographical studies (confronting the results of historical studies with knowledge of the formation of the Vistula estuary). Only non-invasive studies, i.e., geo-radar or electrical resistivity technique, were not included, due to the experience required for the analysis and the much greater difficulty of interpreting the results of the studies.

First of all, the authors collected the evidence base of over 200 maps and aerial photos from the rich collections (over 3500 items in Gdańsk), including Architekturmuseum der Technischen Universität Berlin (Architectural Museum of the Technical University of Berlin, Berlin, Germany), Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku (State Archive in Gdańsk, Gdańsk, Poland), Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv (Federal Archive-Military Archive, Freiburg im Breisgau, Germany), Biblioteka Gdańska Polskiej Akademii Nauk (Polish Academy of Sciences, Gdańsk Library, Gdańsk, Poland), Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe (Central Military Archive, Warsaw, Poland), Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz (Secret State Archives Prussian Cultural Heritage Foundation, Berlin, Germany), National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland, United States of America, and Urząd Miasta Gdańska, Wydział Geodezji (Gdańsk Municipal Administration, Department of Geodesy, Gdańsk, Poland) [Chart 1]. During the archival research, a representative group of such sources were selected. Although the first records concerning the Vistula estuary (the depth of the fairway) date back to 1583, the authors focused on maps showing the formation of Westerplatte isle, its transformation into a peninsula and subsequent development and transformations. Therefore, Chart 1 shows that the structural division of maps, plans and photos is accurate and illustrative for reconstructing the space of Westerplatte for the entire period after 1698. The particular references to those archival records are linked with relevant items in the mentioned list.
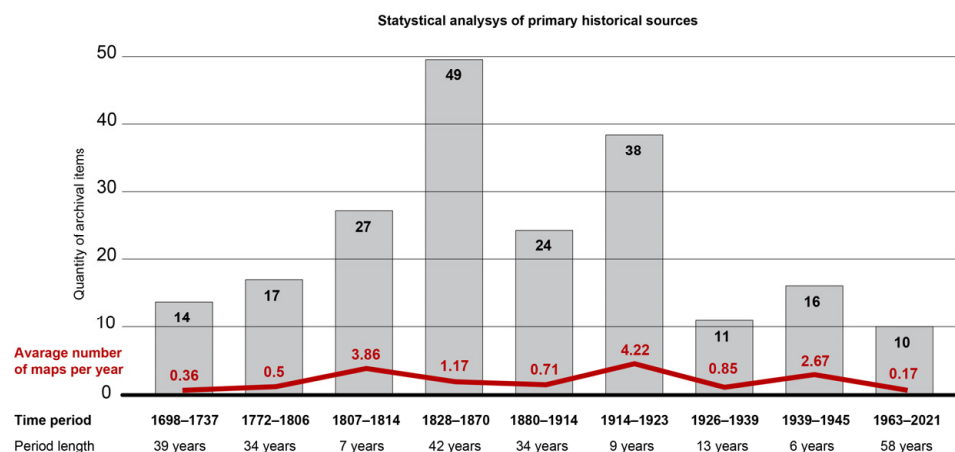

Chart 1. Statistical analysis of cartographical primary sources used in the research. The average number of analysed maps of Westerplatte per year.

Although history is a linear process, the landscape transformations of Westerplatte were taking place at different speeds in particular periods. Moreover, the differences in quantity and quality of historical sources depanding on the time of their creation (and other data useful for reconstruction of spatial changes) make the problem of their representativeness. Sometimes, we may analyse many nearly identical sources, other times we have to rely only on a unique one. Summarizing Chart 1, it should be emphasized that the most intense and detailed period of landscape transformation took place in the period from a few years before the Second World War to its first year. For this reason, aerial photographs were also used to capture these quick and subtle changes not sufficiently

recorded by cartography. Due to the strategic role of Westerplatte as the main gateway to the port of Gdańsk, the peninsula has been recorded in an incomparably greater number of aerial photos than any other place in this part of Europe [44–49].

The main scientific method used in the described research is based on cartographic retrogression combined with the results of archaeological excavations [Figure 2]. Selected maps and plans were mutually aligned for maximum geographical precision. Comparing different maps required them to be mutually calibrated. The main problem was the geographical accuracy of older maps from before the 19th century. Due to the drawing techniques used at that time, they had many distortions in the mapping of the terrain. Moreover, they could have been further distorted later during the reprographic process. Therefore, the maps were always matched in reverse chronological order, taking the most recent and most accurate map as a reference. Each older map was scaled accordingly (after conversion from old units of measurement to metric) and adjusted to the newer one. In the absence of anoriginal scale or large discrepancies, the matching of the maps was improved by referring to the constant elements present on both sheets. It was usually buildings, fortifications, hydrotechnical structures, road layout or other characteristic terrain points, etc. The technical irregularities were then interpolated and compared in Auto CAD 2019 software for which the reference map is compatible and inscribed in a coordinate system compliant with the applicable standard. Moreover, recent field works and archaeological excavations conducted in 2016–2022 provided the required feedback to assess the quality of data provided from written and cartographic sources [16]. It is worth mentioning that this type of doubled procedure of research is seldom applied in similar projects. Thanks to this process, satisfactory accuracy was achieved for further analysis, meaning that all the information could be compared and cross-referenced in the interpolation process, and then physically verified in situ.

The maps were the basis for further analysis of the coastline transformation, the civilian and military facilities, changes in the transport network, forestation, etc. Consequently, the history of Westerplatte has been described and illustrated as a process of permanent transformation, which is crucial for conservation issues. Moreover, the collection of maps created is linked with the current geodesic map from the State Resources, allowing the presentation of the results of this research on more accessible platforms such as the Google Maps application.

The method is crucial for the verification and synthesizing of the multiple map sources as well as aerial photographs [50,51], with different levels of detail and cartographical accuracy [52]. It allows accurate reconstruction of the spatial transformation process, including its natural and anthropogenic character.

Although the authors implemented modern methods of documentation (including GIS and CAD modelling), the results of the research were illustrated in nine synthetic maps visually presenting the reconstructed process of Westerplatte's spatial transformations. To facilitate referring information from the text to the maps, the most important elements of the described development (landscape) are marked with letters in the text and on individual illustrations.
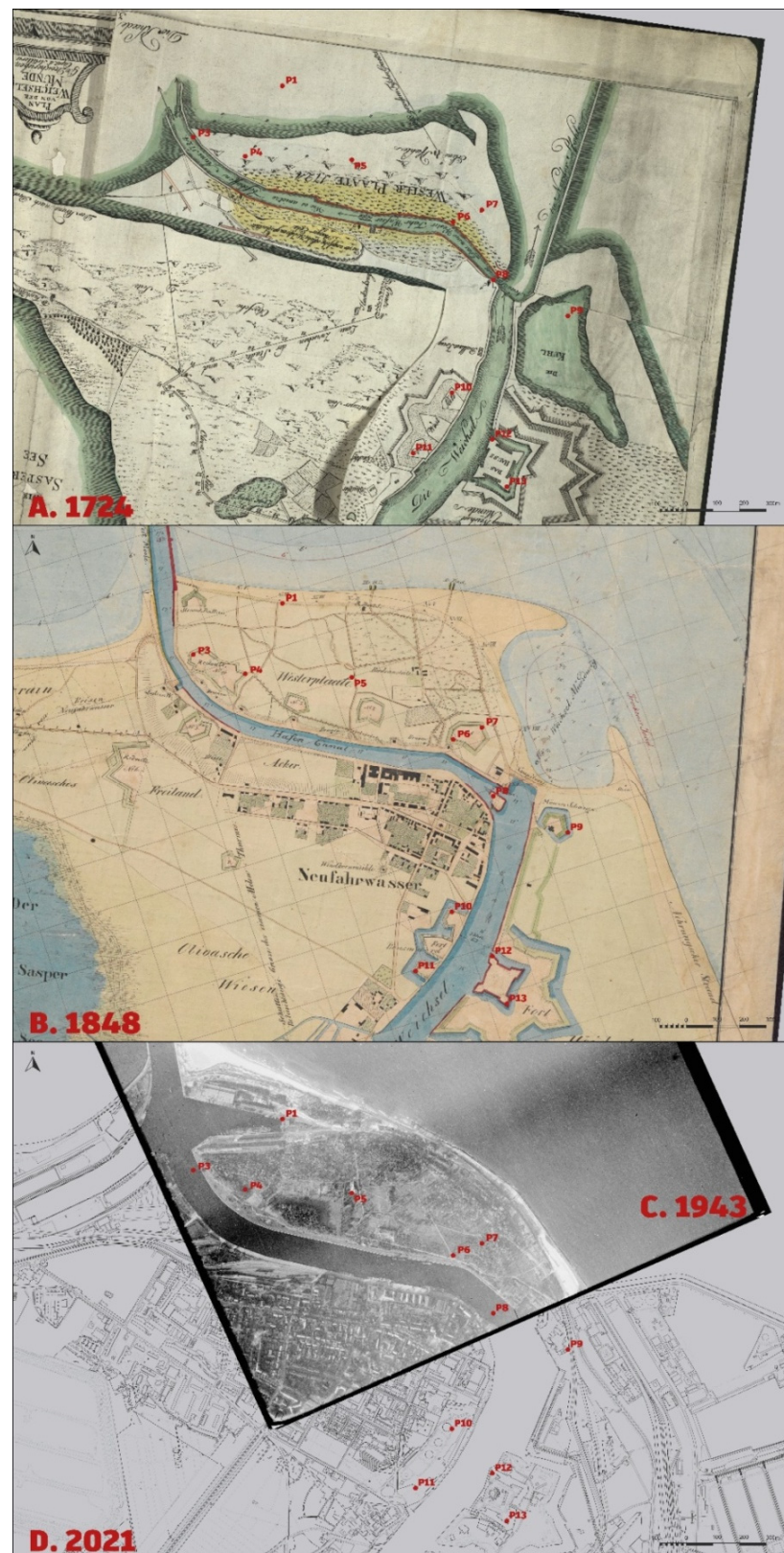
Figure 2. Methods of interpolating and calibrating the historical sources: (**A**) hand-drawn map from 1724; (**B**) printed geodesic map from 1848; (**C**) aerial photo from 1943; (**D**) modern CAD map.

3. Results—Spatial Transformations of Westerplatte

In the 14th century, Gdansk became the main harbour of the State of Teutonic Knights in Prussia (and later the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth). In the 1370s, harbour facilities

were also developed outside the city and thus the area was inspected by the customs officials from the castle. As a result, an additional checkpoint was built by the Vistula mouth which gave origin to the Wisłoujście Fortress, guarding the entrance to the Gdańsk harbour for the next four hundred years [53]. Every spring since 1593, the waterway through uncertain waters of the river mouth was tracked by the special commission. The reports and sketches made in the course of those procedures established a solid base for further historical research [Figure 3].
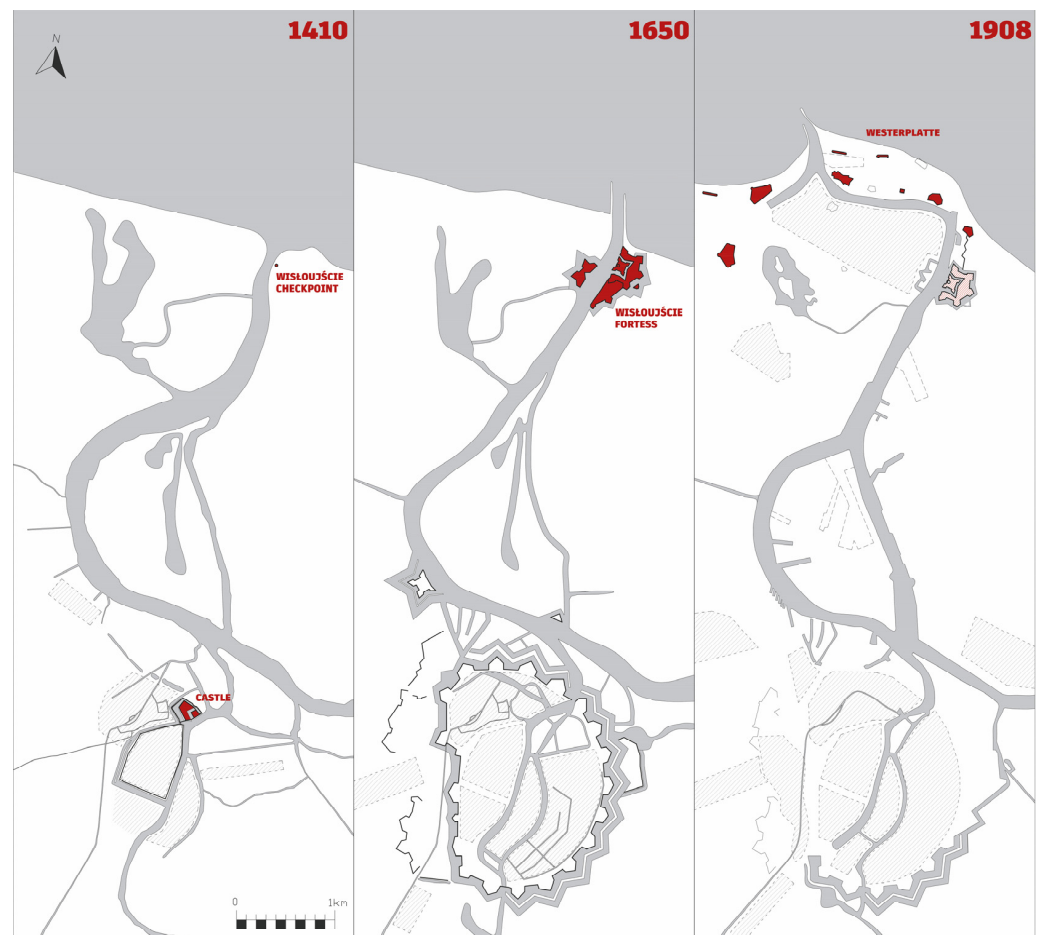

Figure 3. Scheme of the Gdansk city's development along with its direct protection of the port's entry.

3.1. Stage 1: 1698–1737

In the late 17th century, two isles appeared on both sides of the mouth—Oster- and Wester-Platte. The Osterplatte was an ephemeral site but its western neighbour survived. It was separated from the dry land by a shallow lagoon which was turned into the alternative entrance to the port, bypassing the problematic river mouth causing the nautical problems mentioned before. A special dam protecting the new canal from silting and linking the island with the mainland was built in 1686 and 1698 [54]. Between the canal and the Wisłoujście Fortress, there was the so-called Balastkrug—a place where the gravel carried as ballast by ships arriving in Gdańsk was left and subsequently used in hydro-technical works to reinforce the Westerplatte island and the banks of the lagoon. The first engineering works that allowed the water way through the lagoon (A) to be tracked were undertaken in 1716–1724 [55]. For a few subsequent decades, the city councillors did not anticipate, however, that the new strip of land might have such military importance [Figure 4]
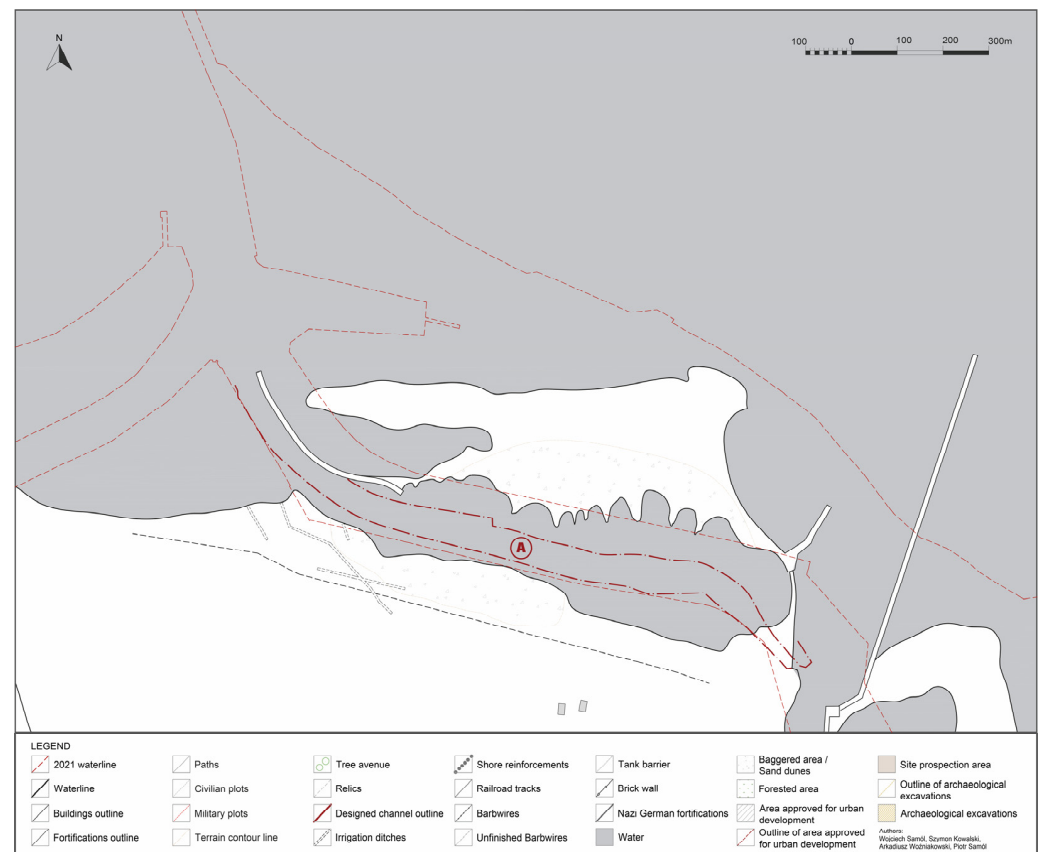
Figure 4. Westerplatte was a lagoon after 1698.

This neglect was laid bare during the Polish Succession War in 1734 when the French military expedition landed on the island of Westerplatte and tried to help Stanisław Leszczyński—the legal pretender to the Polish throne and personally the father-in-law of King Louis XV of France, who was besieged in Gdańsk. The 2000-man corps built a provisional fortification (B) on the lagoon's northern bank. The French units were too weak to break the Gdansk lockdown that had been set by the Saxo-Russian corps under the field-marshal Munich (ca. 18,000 soldiers) and could only occupy the isle [2]. After the capitulation of Gdańsk, those fortifications were abandoned, and quickly disappeared due to increasing erosion [Figure 5]. In 1737 a new waterway led through the lagoon, and a new dam (C) was erected [56]. It was probably then that the rest of the French camp was demolished; however, the presence of French soldiers was confirmed by archaeological surveys conducted in 2017–2019 [16]

3.2. Stage 2: 1772–1806

In the 18th century, the significance of the canal as an alternative entrance to the Gdańsk harbour increased. However, the true milestone in Westerplatte's history was the First Partition of Poland in 1772, when the whole Pomeranian province (except Gdańsk itself), including the western bank of the Vistula river, was taken over by Prussians. They were aware of the site's strategic role and thus located the tax chamber and warehouses there. The canal separated from the mainstream of the Vistula river by the mentioned dam might have been used as a harbour, similar to the docks by the Thames or Liver rivers [57–59]. This new urban area (D), called Neufahrwasser (new waterway), was joined with the former suburbs of Gdańsk (Chełm/Stoltzenberg and Stare Szkoty/AltesSchottland) to create a competitive administrative complex for the Polish city—the so-called combined municipality. Not later than 1783, the western part of Westerplatte was fortified by an earthen battery (E) with a guardhouse [60,61]. However, in 1788, the new Prussian King, Frederick Wilhelm

II, decided to change alliances and supported the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in reforming the state. At that time, the Russian invasion was considered the most severe threat to the security of Neufahrwasser. In 1788–1790, it caused the Prussian government to build four new autonomic ramparts (F) on the southern side of Westerplatte [62]. The western bastion incorporated the older battery (E) by the entrance to the harbour [63].
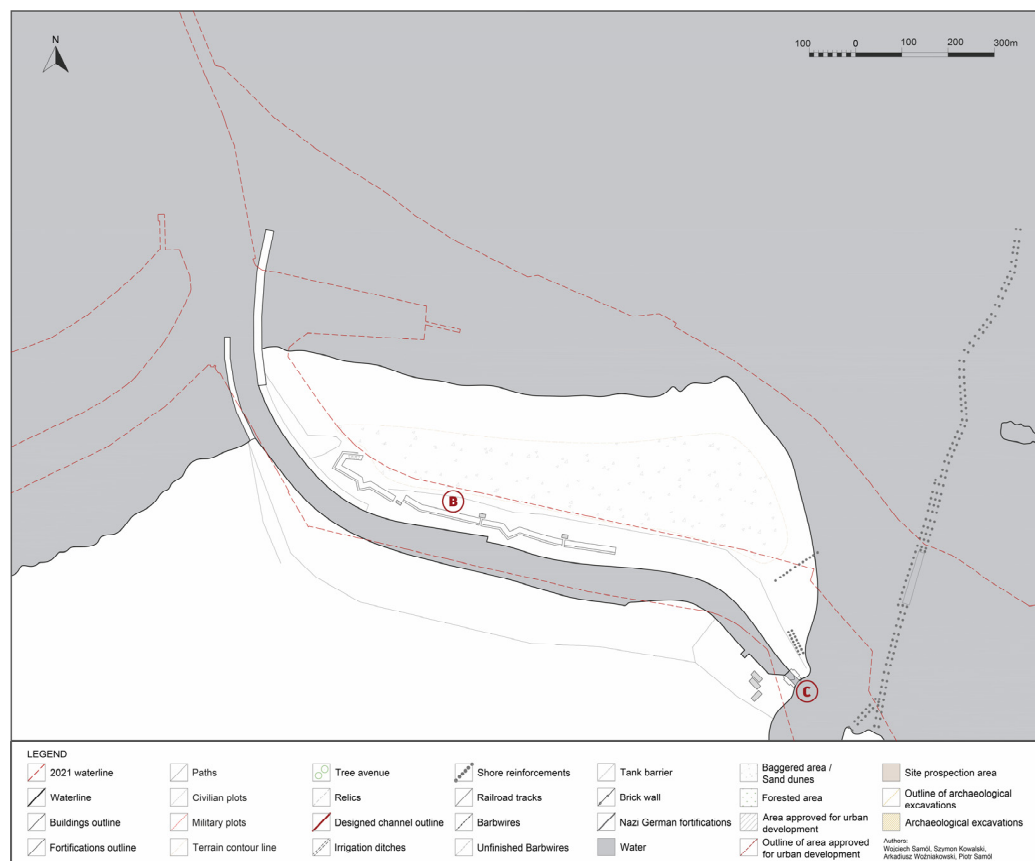

Figure 5. Westerplatte with French fortifications (after 1734).

Just three years after the bastions were completed, Prussia took over Gdańsk and there was no longer a reason for Westerplatte to be fortified. Moreover, Neufahrwasser became a part of Gdańsk harbour, and the improvement of traffic between all its features became a priority. In 1804, the port's administration widened the mouth, and an earth wall strengthened the eastern bank. Before 1802, a second lock was set, parallel to the old one (C), between the Vistula and the canal [64].

3.3. Stage 3: 1807–1814

The military and political situation changed once again in 1807 when Gdańsk was besieged and captured by Napoleon's Great Army. After the treaty of Tilsit, Gdańsk was declared a free city and a French protectorate, and thus it became one of the most important imperial military bases in Eastern Europe [65]. Undoubtedly, it was the reason why the French army administration decided to renew its fortifications (E, F), including those located on Westerplatte (e.g., rampart no. 4 was transformed). Due to increasing traffic in the external port of Neufahrwasser, the Westerplatte banks of the canal were adopted as harbour facilities, including two new kitchens (G) for sailors [66] [Figure 6].
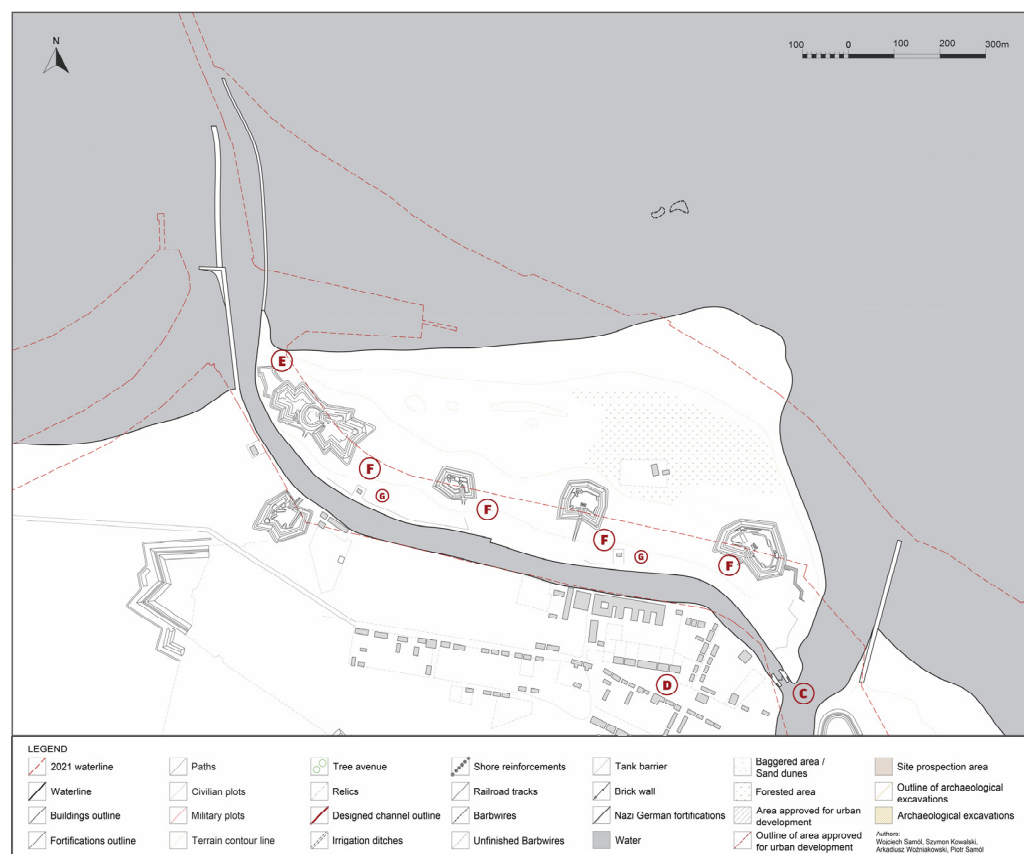
Figure 6. Westerplatte with its Prussian fortifications (in 1812).

The first attempts to stabilize the dunes around the mouth of the river with plantings were carried out in the mid-18th century by the Society of Nature, active in Gdańsk since 1743, and weresomeof the first examples of environmental engineering [67]. However, similar solutions were also being applied in Prussian coast fortresses in Pillau and Kolbergfromthe end of the 18th century [62]. A forest plantation established around 1803 in the eastern part of Westerplatte inspired future recomposition of the area in the following years.

After the failure of Napoleon's invasion of Russia, Gdańsk was besieged by Prussian-Russian forces. Westerplatte played an important military role and it was the place where one of the bloodiest battles occurring during the siege was fought (16 September 1813). In 1734, the city being cut off from the sea caused its capitulation [68].

3.4. Stage 4: 1828–1870

In 1828, the ice jam in the Vistula mouth brought the most catastrophic flood in the history of Gdańsk [69]. A similar tragedy happened in 1840 when the Vistula broke a narrow strip of land around 5 km east of Gdansk and found a new estuary to the Baltic Sea. During that catastrophic flood, the village of Gorki was wiped off the earth. However, this disastrous event allowed the closure of the old river mouth beside Westerplatte (H), turning the isle into a peninsula. The construction work took a few years and in 1840–1845 there was only a stone dyke across the old mouth of the Vistula [70]. The sea currents created a temporary pond (I) between the dyke and the sea (finally filled with earth at the turn of the 20th century) [71–73].

The linking of the former island with the mainland allowed the development of new facilities such as baths, which had been gaining popularity in Europe since the 1810s. Although Martin Kruger bought16 plots with the intention to build sea baths in Westerplatte in 1829 [74], the first installation for sea-bathing admirers (J) opened only

in 1842 [70,75]. A decade later, the fortifications at Westerplatte were strengthened by two coastal field batteries (K) located in the baths' close neighbourhood, which did not facilitate the symbiosis between them [76–79] [Figure 7].
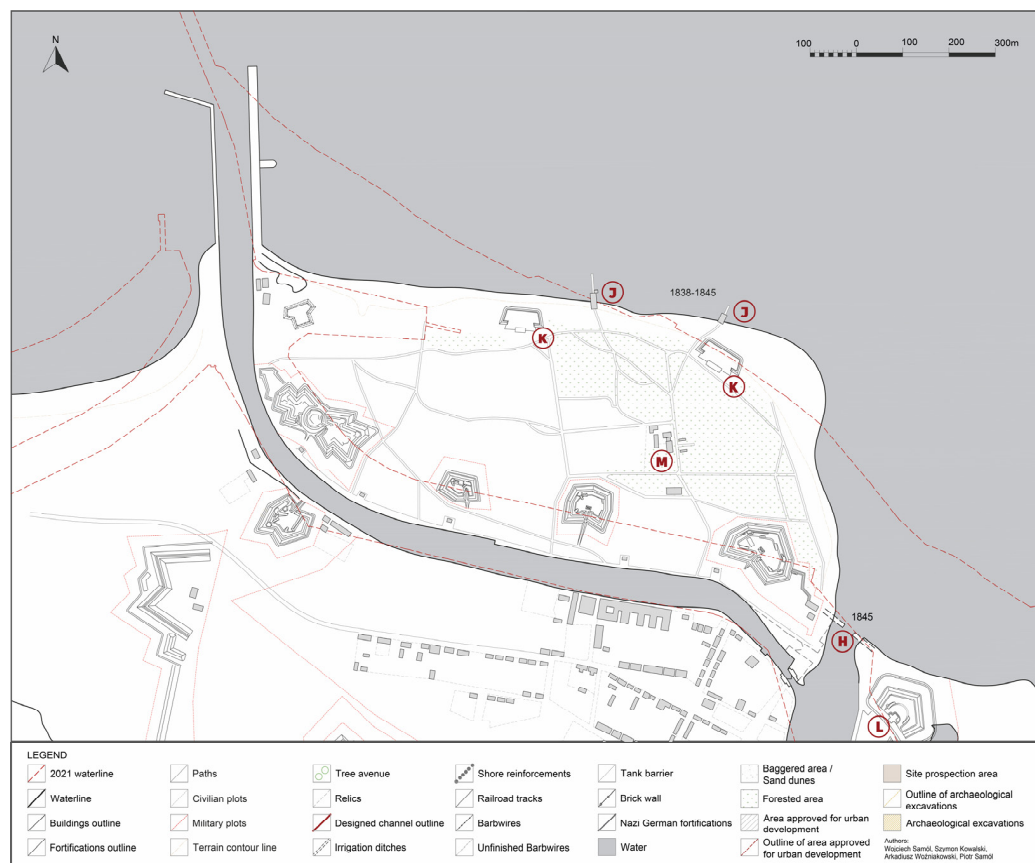

Figure 7. Westerplatte strengthened with the coastal batteries along with the beginnings of the resort facilities (in 1846).

Due to the change of the Vistula mouth, it was decided that the Westerplatte ramparts would be connected with the Wisłoujście Fortress through an intermediate fortification (L)—the Seagull Fort (Möwenschanze), which was completed in 1846 [70,76,80,81].

As technological advancements of artillery in the 1870s and onwards significantly increased effectiveness, range and salvo weight, as well as the accuracy of modern ordnance, a need to expand and modernize the old fortifications emerged [82]. Consequently, the Prussian military administration erected new fortifications in Brzeźno/Brösen and between Westerplatte and Wisłoujście Fortress, which caused the abandonment of two central (nos. 2 and 3) ramparts out of the four on the peninsula [83–85]. The new limitation of the restricted fortified zone was established, designating the central part of the peninsula as a less restrictive area (M) where the erection of civilian buildings of light construction was permitted [86,87].

3.5. Stage 5: 1880–1914

Although in 1890 the Prussian government permitted the building of a new Schichau's shipyard in the close vicinity of the Gdansk fortifications and, a few years later, it allowed the demolition of part of the inner circle of bastions surrounding the city [88], its policy on Westerplatte was not so liberal [85]. Moreover, the changes in the German strategic plans of 1905–1907 (the so-called Schlieffen's plan) caused Gdańsk to maintain its military potential, especially in terms of coastal fortifications as part of the eastern fortresses for the protection of the borderland against Russia [89–91]. Although some of the plans were not

implemented, the new structures of 1905–1914 were stronger than those built before. On the eve of the First World War (1914–1918), a new stationary battery (N) and observation bunker were built as part of a modern coastal battery fire control system [79].

At the turn of the 19th century, Gdańsk became one of the Reich's main shipyard hubs. As a result, canal and harbour entrance enhancements were made in 1908–1912. During that modernization, some parts of rampart no. 4 of 1783/1788 were demolished [89,92]. Meanwhile, at the end of the 1880s, the "Weichsel Gesellschaft" (the company which took control over the swimming site at Westerplatte [Figure 8]) started the construction works of a villa settlement in the centre of the peninsula [93–95]. This caused Westerplatte to experience an extraordinary development boom, with more hotels, resorts, seaside swimming premises and parks (P). Such tendencies in urban planning were related to Howard's ideas of "Garden cities" [96]. A telephone network and electricity were also brought in. The baths of Westerplatte became quite a popular resort on the shores of the Baltic Sea. There were over 40 buildings erected, mostly made of wood and thin brick walls (up to 12 cm). Light construction resulted from the above-mentioned restrictions concerning buildings in fortified zones so that all civilian structures could be demolished within the first hours after a proclamation of war. According to the legal regulations of the act of Reichstag and directions of "Reichs-Rayon-Komission", one to three fortification zones around every fortification work had been established (each with a width of 600 to 1275 m). Inside these zones, every investment or change in the landscape (such as mason structures) was either prohibited or the subject of arrangements with the military administration of Gdansk Fortress [97].
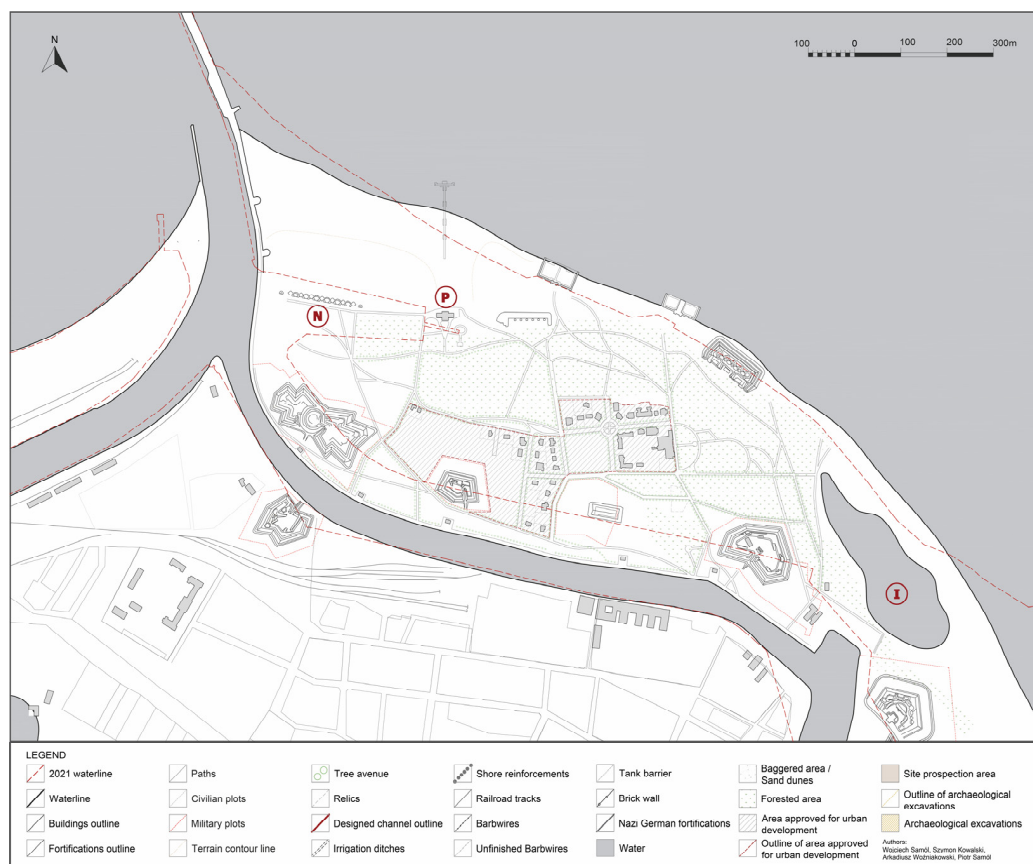

Figure 8. Westerplatte during extensive urban development with summer villas and an SPA resort (in 1895).

3.6. Stage 6: 1914–1918/1923

The First World War ended in Germany's failure. According to the Treaty of Versailles, Gdańsk was declared a demilitarized free city, dependent on the High Commissioner of the League of Nations. Still, Polish national interests were protected because the railways' and harbour's administration were subordinated to the Polish Government. The treaty's political and functional details were defined in the Polish-Gdańsk Convention signed in Paris in November 1920. As a result, all military structures on Westerplatte were abandoned. Because of the impediments to guaranteeing Polish privileges in Gdańsk, in the early 1920s, Poland started secretly purchasing plots (O) in the central part of the peninsula [98]. Finally, after many meetings of the League of Nations Council, as a result of the action, the exterritorial supply base for the Polish Army was established. Formally, any military installations in the Free City of Gdańsk/Danzig were banned, and thus the whole complex was officially named a restricted area of military warehouses [99]. It must be mentioned here that the idea of building a separate harbour for the Polish state initially occurred in 1917–1918 when the regency over the occupied Congress Poland was established by two emperors of Germany and Austria-Hungary [100]. What is more, the Prussian military administration considered building a new ammunition basin on Westerplatte in the final years before the First World War. Therefore, neither location of the Polish base nor its military facility was new, because the advantages of Westerplatte had been analysed before [Figure 9].
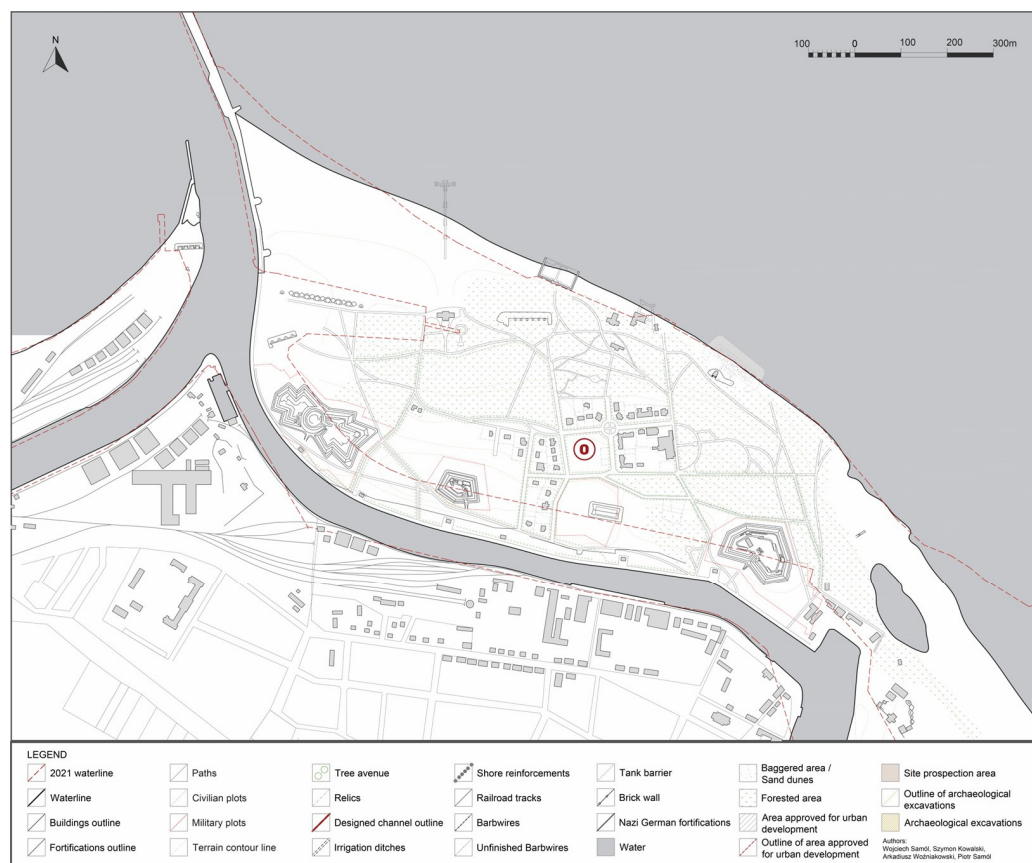

Figure 9. Westerplatte during the First World War (1914–1918).

3.7. Stage 7: 1926–1939

Following the Resolution of the League of Nations of 14 March 1924, Westerplatte was designated for storage, loading, unloading and transit of munitions for Poland [Figure 10].
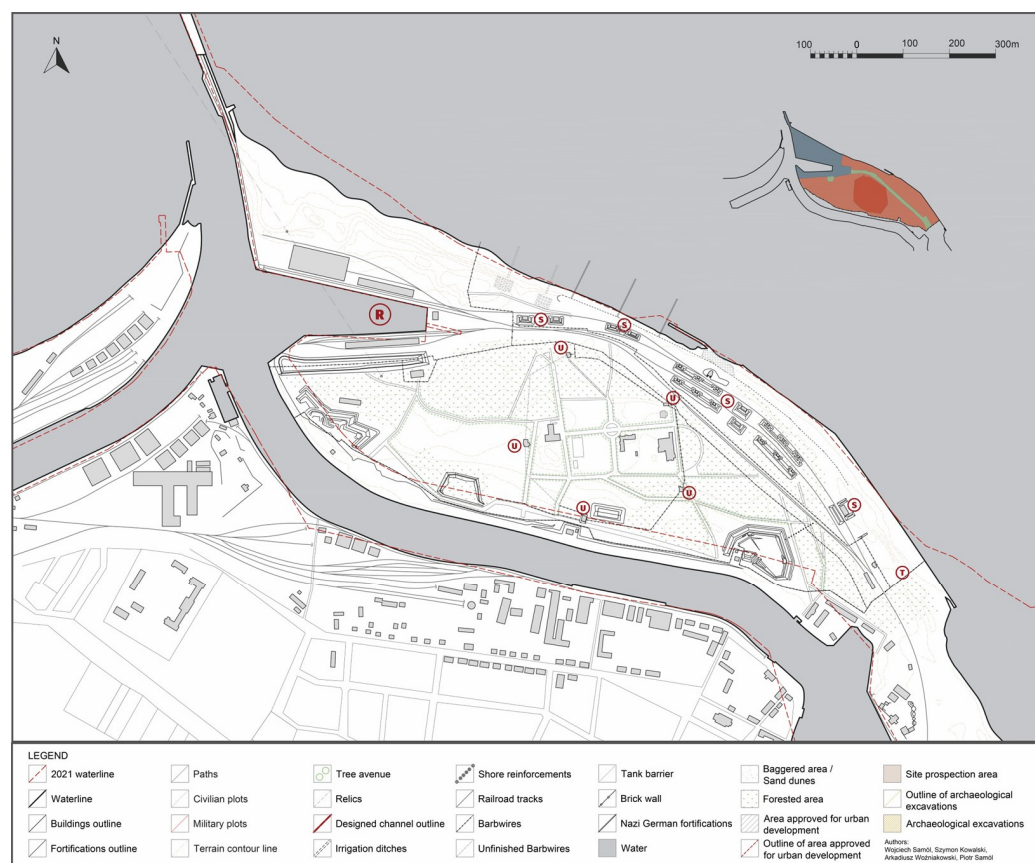
Figure 10. Westerplatte in 1939 as a fortified Polish military transit depot. The top scheme shows three different areas of defence. Blue—port facilities, green—train transit area, red—military area with inner circle perimeter.

The area was approximately 3.5 km in perimeter and covered 60 hectares of land. To provide the basic port infrastructure, the Polish government decided to dig an ammunition basin (about 950 m of coastline) along with installing six bayside cranes and building three ammunition warehouses (R), and nineteen ammunition depots (S) sheltered by earthen embankments [101]. In addition, a part of the earthen fortifications was dismantled and the remaining inhabitants of the peninsula were forced to relocate. An essential element was the location of the railway tracks forming the new port service infrastructure [102–104]. A high border wall (T) was built from the base of the peninsula to the dyke along the southern edge of the canal. The League of Nations limited crew size to 88 soldiers and issued an explicit ban on building new fortifications on the Westerplatte peninsula [105].

At first, the garrison on the peninsula occupied former spa buildings and villas (O). With the growing need to create better living conditions for the soldiers, after the political crisis of 1932, military authorities built new barracks for more than 100 crew members, and constructed five new guardhouses around them (U). This decision was induced by the public mood which in 1933 led to the National Socialists winning the elections [4]. Notification for the initial projects was also sent to the Gdańsk authorities, which initially strongly objected but eventually granted permission to build the facilities [106]. An interesting concept was the secret location of combat shelters under the former spa buildings and in the basements of the new guardhouses which the Germans attacking Westerplatte did not know about. In addition, shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Polish commanders built an additional chain of field fortifications in front of the main guardhouses.

3.8. Stage 8: 1939–1945

Preparations made in the last weeks of August 1939 resulted in a significant increase in the defensive value of the Polish outpost and its effectiveness during the fighting. Thanks to a seven-day defence of the Polish garrison, Westerplatte has gone down in history as a symbolic place regarding the outbreak of World War II. After the capitulation, a process of obliteration of the traces of Polish presence began. The slave labour of hundreds of Polish prisoners, who quickly dismantled the buildings, irreversibly changed this place [2,5]. Most of the buildings in Westerplatte were demolished in 1939/1940 and the building material was used to build the Stutthof concentration camp. Despite cleaning up the area, most of Westerplatte remained undeveloped until the end of the war. Most probably it was connected with unspecified and unrealized plans for a greater extension of the shipyard and the port of Gdansk. The area of almost one square kilometre at the entrance to the port with was certainly foreseen as a backup for the developing Kriegsmarine base. However, until spring 1945 the area of Westerplatte was used only within the ammunition pool. The fighting in March 1945 and the post-war discharge of ammunition and unexploded ordnance in the preserved buildings irreversibly devastated the last of the preserved (large-sized) buildings of the former Polish depot. It can be assumed that these years left their greatest mark on the historical buildings of the former resort and the later buildings of the Polish depot [Figure 11].
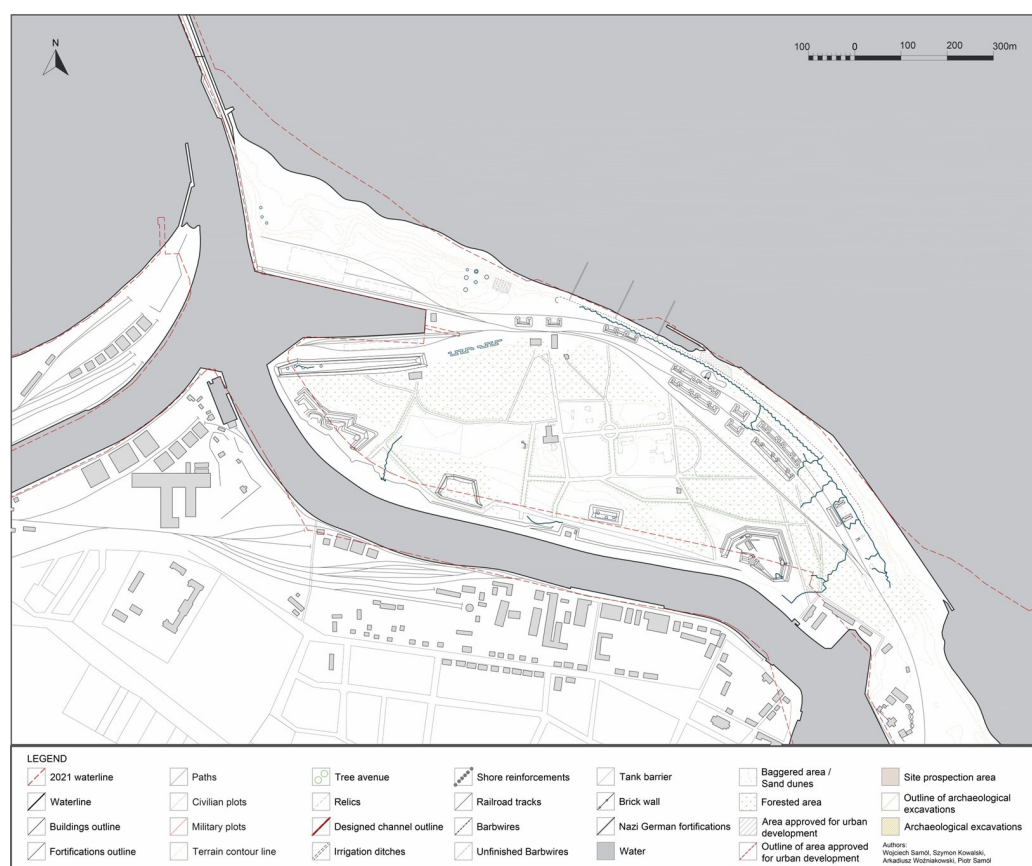

Figure 11. Westerplatte in 1945 with Nazi German Fortifications and dismantled resort facilities.

3.9. Stage 9: 1963–1966

After the end of the hostilities, as during World War II, the area was mainly subject to military investments such as a radio station and a navy observation post, as well as a shooting range and the observation tower of one of the new coastal batteries in the central part of the peninsula. Additionally, a branch of the Naval Shipyard was established within the ammunition basin and damaged quays. The whole area of Westerplatte was

again fenced off and access became strictly limited. Despite this, as early as 1946, a symbolic cemetery for the fallen Polish soldiers (W) was created in place of the destroyed guardhouse no. 5 [107]. The subsequent years, during which an interest in the symbol of Westerplatte grew, coincided with the economic development of the People's Republic of Poland along with the city of Gdańsk. For logistical reasons, the port channel had to be widened so that the shipyard and port could handle larger sea vessels (V). That irreversibly destroyed traces of most of the historic structures on the southern and eastern parts of the peninsula, in particular those that were used for defence in 1939, which from today's perspective represented the greatest historical value. The expansion of port infrastructure also contributed much to the degradation of the remaining land. Along with the military area, only a strip in the central part of the peninsula remained partially original [108,109]. For those reasons, from the mid-1960s onwards, the question of how to honour this place and, on the other hand, how to emphasize its historical value began to arise. The answer was the 1963 nationwide architectural competition for the development of a public area in Westerplatte. Although the winning project was not fully implemented, its most characteristic element—a mound with a monument (Y)—was created, and since then has been towering over the entrance to the port. As part of this project, new paths (X) and parking lots (Z) were built, often without any respect to the historical plan of the garrison, which disturbed the image of this historic space, already preserved to a small extent. Moreover, as a result of the transformation most visitors could no longer recognize the values of authenticity and integrity that should have been crucial for a historical site [Figure 12].
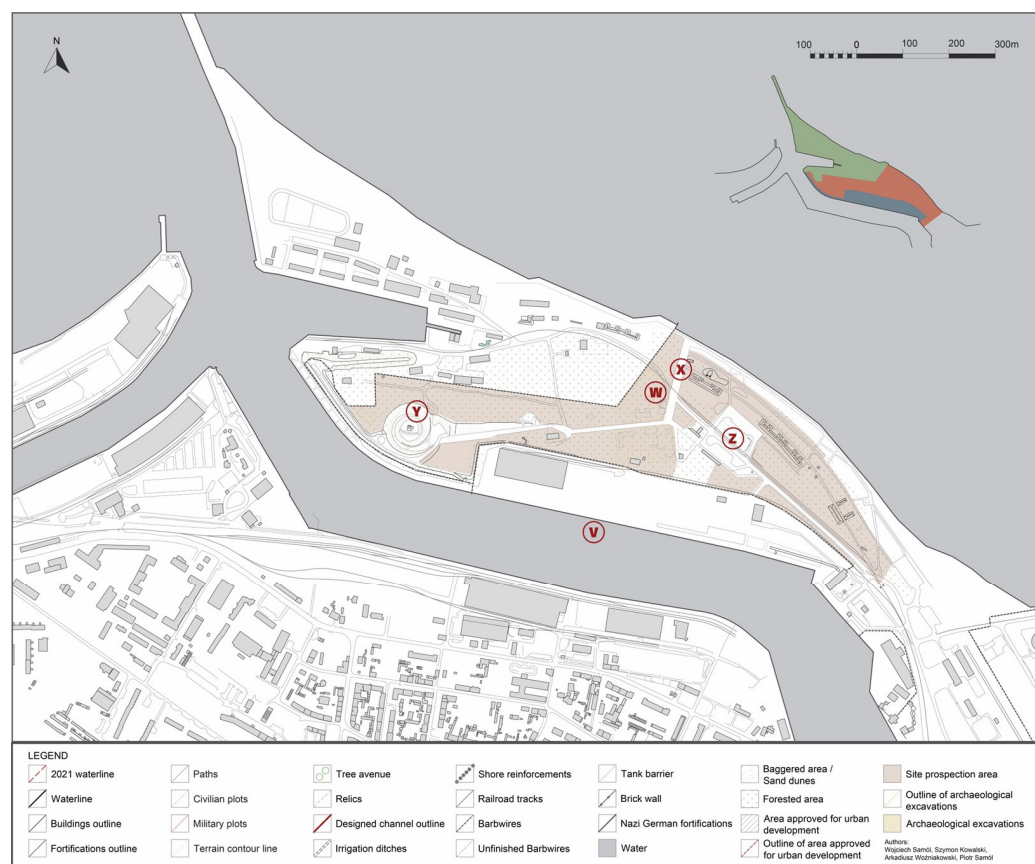

Figure 12. Modern-day Westerplatte with a monumental statue on the mound, container terminal and military area. The map also includes a prospection of the terrain and archaeological excavations. The top scheme shows the division problem—today's Westerplattehas three different land users. Green—Army, red—memorial site, blue—container terminal.

3.10. Perspectives

The future image of Westerplatte is still not determined—the main struggle is to set a strict agenda for the Museum of the Second World War conservation recommendations. However, the most genuine threat to its cultural landscape might come from the current harbour administration which aims to develop a new industrial area located on the waters of the gulf, directly north of the peninsula (including new containers and oil terminals). New visions of Westerplatte itself span from the restitution of the stage on the eve of the war in 1939, which means the reconstruction of the landscape of the military depot, to the modern implementation of new facilities on the peninsula. This article may help to solve the problem of the lack of full understanding of Westerplatte's multi-layered history, which has marked its space and cultural landscape.

4. Discussion

The reconstructed history of Westerplatte shows what a challenge it is to treat the historic landscape in the context of the changes taking place. On the one hand, HUL transformations are, as it were, written into their definition [21]. On the other hand, the peninsula is a special place due to the fact that a large part of it is occupied by a museum. As early as the second half of the 20th century, the concept of an open-air museum was superseded by the "Landschaftmuseum" [110,111]. However, this idea means protecting its current status and inviolability, which can be of limited use in urban areas. The awareness of multitemporal evolutions and the non-linear process of landscape formation should encourage researchers into interdisciplinary documentation of the evidence of its changes. Otherwise, the lack of the stakeholders' respect for the complex history might cause attempts at "musealization" of the space, focusing on one particular period and blurring the others.

The spatial transformation of Westerplatte, therefore, proves that any analysis of the historical landscape must also take into account the fourth dimension—time [19]. The basic problem in the current research concerning battlefields is the spot analysis of the landscape [12–15]. Meanwhile, the presentation of Westerplatte's history utilizing a set of traditional maps or ultimately a virtual map that allows the tracking of the changes throughout a period of over 300 years provides an ideal opportunity to understand the events of the past as a process. Obviously, the detail of this type of consideration depends on the available sources—historical and archaeological (also archaeobotanical) [24–30]. Nevertheless, the use of new technologies and the management of big data collections are always associated with the need to transfer dispersed historical sources to the digital language. The selection of historical primary sources (assessment of their credibility) is always a qualitative and not quantitative activity [41–43]. Thus, it cannot be easily automated because historical landscape research depends on the accessibility and representativeness of these sources. s. This is probably the reason that many studies on multitemporal landscape transformations have been focused on the last century [21,112,113].

Comparing the air photos, geodesic plans and hand-written maps brings with it the crucial problem of representativeness of evidence in such a research activity. Numerous layers and complicated archival material have showed the importance of in situ research for the verification and supplementing of sources. The stratification (stratigraphy) of the peninsula's plan (including individual architectural structures, e.g., barracks, casinos, officers' villas) is—due to so many transformations—not only a way of documenting the history of the place but also a supplementary research method [114]. Certainly, the next step in presenting knowledge about history (including new research findings) may be the use of virtual reality techniques. However, such actions must be based on properly selected, analysed and synthesized sources.

A separate problem is the apparent interdisciplinarity of scientific research. Most of the older literature on Westerplatte's history [2–6] shows only selected aspects of transformations of the historical landscape. For this reason, literature studies are only an introduction to the research and will not replace the laborious collection of archival data. Once devel-

oped, however, they become an open resource—enabling the development of comparative studies in the future. According to the authors, the key to the success of collecting archival data and using new methods (GIS, LIDAR) is consistency in tracking the entire historical process [17,18,23,24,26–28,37]. On a greater scale, the application of geomorphologic studies is crucial [9–12,31–34], but they must be compared with the traditional historical primary sources.

Following the modern tendencies in humanities, some geographers have proposed concepts of narratives and storytelling as a new approach towards comprehensive landscape studies [112,115,116]. They are usually focused on using and testing new methods of presenting the history of landscape (e.g., virtual reality, extended reality, etc.), instead of analysing HUL itself [115]. Moreover, the popularity of landscape research and the polyphony of methods used in various scientific disciplines often do not contribute to expanding the evidence base but only to the reinterpretation of the traditional historical narrative. On the other hand, the scale of research also matters. In micro-scale (e.g., Westerplatte) analysis, operating on the best possible reference material is essential, making it often only the interdisciplinary use of available historical maps that can make progress.

5. Conclusions

The results described above show how multifaceted the analysis of the historical landscape evolution is. Westerplatte—a natural sandbank at the mouth of the river, transformed into a peninsula; the subject of temporary and more permanent military investments for 150 years; one of the seaside resorts and an unfinished villa district—all these elements of the landscape were part of the reality that became the battlefield in 1939. Later, political and economic decisions gradually began to blur the symbolic space. Paradoxically, when large financial efforts were finally made to establish a cultural park themed around the battle, the ad hoc expansion of the port area made implementing these plans difficult and sometimes impossible. Moreover, part of Westerplatte is still an important, inaccessible military area, which is the continuation of this place's functions from the beginning of its existence.

The main impact of the detailed analyses presented above is to highlight the process of joining different types of data. Although archaeological, archaeobotanical or geomorphological data have to be elaborated by a specialist from the appropriate field of science, there should be no doubt that all of them—because of the purpose of use—should be analysed as the primary historical sources for the multitemporal landscape evolution.

Moreover, the role of time as a factor in shaping the landscape is surprisingly rarely addressed. At Westerplatte, each of the presented periods was characterized by different vegetation, development and surroundings. It should be emphasized that the scope of the study of four hundred years of transformation differs from geomorphological studies beyond historical cognition (written sources, archaeology of civilizations, etc.). Although historical politics influence the emphasis on one particular period—which was pointed out in the title of this article (the symbolic place where World War II broke out in Europe)—it does not mean, or at least should not, to cross out the four centuries of history of the Westerplatte peninsula.

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