



ARCHETHICS

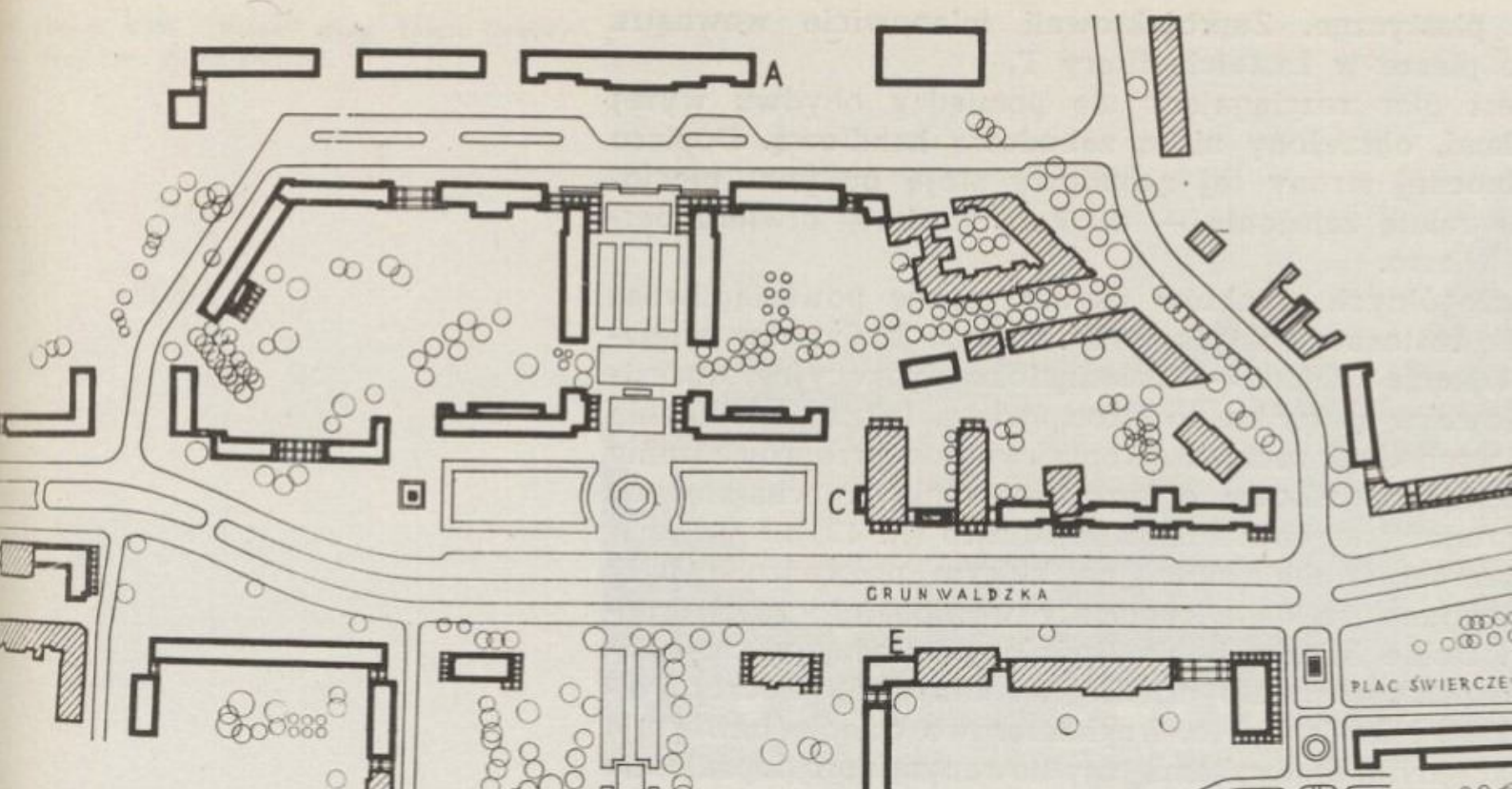
Dissonant Heritage Cities

Gdańsk, April 9-10/2024

core network meeting

Dissonant Heritage

Architecture of socialist-realism in Gdańsk



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Dear Guests,

We are pleased to welcome you to Gdańsk, in a city marked by dissonant heritage like few others in Europe, considered by historians to be the place where one of the most tragic chapters in the history of mankind began, the World War II. This conflict, in which finally two great totalitarianisms clashed, resulted in the loss of the achievements of hundreds of years, including magnificent works of architecture.

At the same time, this cruel history also gave birth to a great will for peace, reconstruction and reconciliation between the nations of Europe. Today we are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the European Union and celebrate together the enormous effort that the generation that happened to live in the Stalinist period made to rebuild the city that was to become their home.

Sacrificial work and the pursuit of better living conditions do not have political colours. It is the civilisational duty of designers and builders - the main ethical dimension of architecture. Whereas our ethical duty is not only to preserve the achievements of past generations but also to find a way to maintain or even improve the quality of living in these often once modern, even revolutionary structures to match the standards of the present day.

Piotr Lorens, City Architect

Model of an early concept of Klonowa Street, Charles de Gaulle Park and the square in front of the Wrzeszcz Railway Station





Ulica Długa - Long Street with the Town Hall



Grobla - Dam Street with the Royal Chapel



The historic harbour with the Crane and with the Archaeological Museum (below)

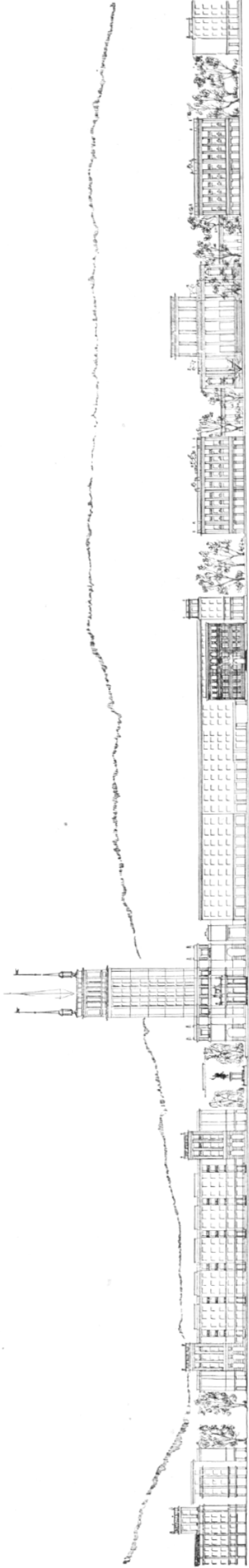


Socialist-realist architecture of Gdańsk - history and key facts

As a result of **the World War II** Gdańsk suffered **massive damage** amounting to up to 90% of its pre-war fabric. The industry was deliberately destroyed by allied-forces bombings and then stripped of its most valuable equipment, first by the retreating German army and then by the Soviet **looting** squads. Housing structures dating largely from earlier centuries were overwhelmingly **burned down** in fires that continued long after the fighting ended. The population **evacuated** by sea and land via military transports and on their own. Waves of people fleeing from the the combat zone of the proceeding **Eastern Front**, those who lost their homes during the **Warsaw Uprising**, transports of Polish citizens displaced from areas **annexed by the USSR** and finally great masses of people hoping for **employment** in ports, shipbuilding and reconstruction swept in turn through the city.

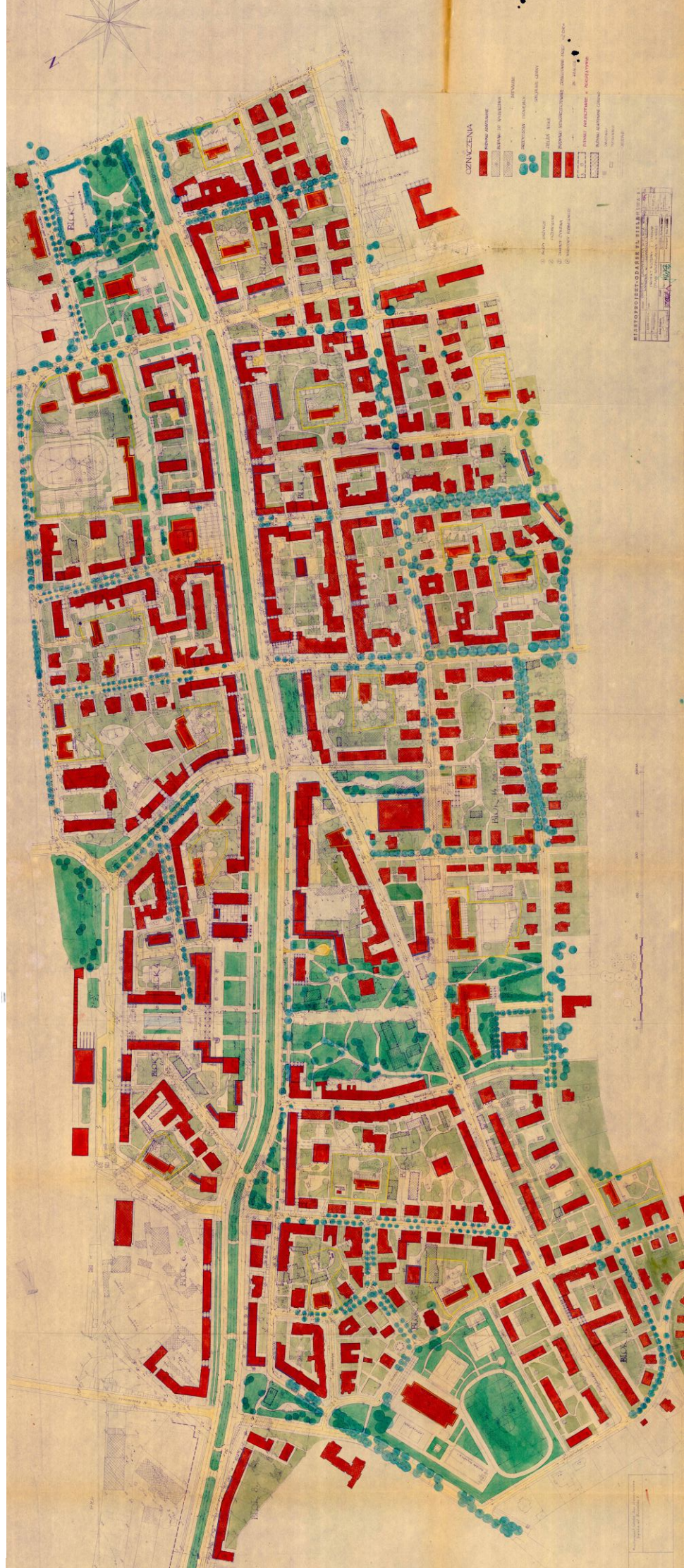
The **post-war reconstruction** of Gdańsk, and especially Wrzeszcz – once a suburb that, due to a lot less damage than the historic downtown, took over the function of the city center – was not only aimed at meeting housing demands, but also had an **ideological dimension**. The purpose of the top-down imposed **socialist-realist** architecture was to consolidate the new political order in the post-war Poland. Although the plan for the **Grunwald Residential District (GDM)** was only partially implemented, its general principles are still being visible in the cityscape and continued in terms of planning.



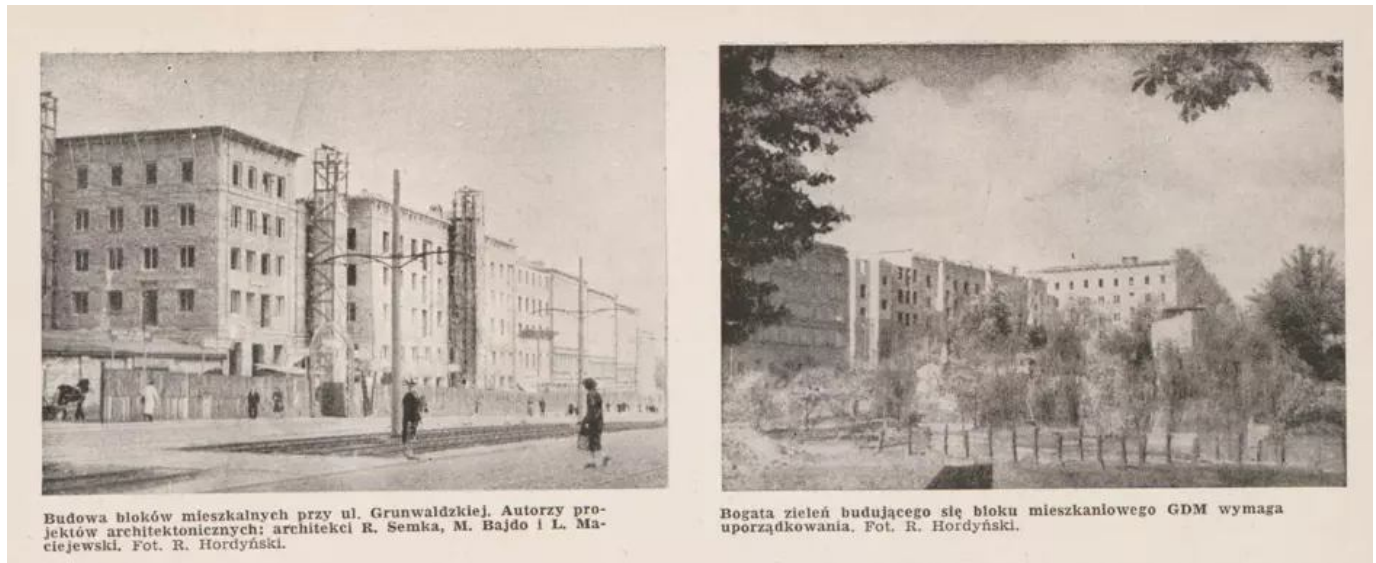


Sylweta głównego założenia GDM.
 Sełana, południowo-zachodnia, ska-
 la 1:2000.

Early stage design of the southern frontage of Grunwaldzka Street featuring a socialist-realist highrise (ultimately executed as Olimp tower) and incorporating the facade of the 1910 post office. Below: a slightly altered general layout of the II stage featuring inventory of surviving pre-war trees.



For architects and urban planners, **rebuilding the city** was a huge challenge – especially given an unprecedented **housing famine**. At the same time, it was a great **opportunity** for changes that had previously been virtually impossible. Picturesque pre-war Gdańsk which today is an object of nostalgia was in fact known for its **substandard** living conditions, with whole blocks deprived of daylight, toilets and access to greenery. Most streets were narrow and **insufficient** in terms of traffic, based on an urban grid dating back to medieval times. All of this was complemented by the new regime's slogans of building **cities for the working class** and the **march of the people into the hearts of cities**, formerly occupied by the bourgeois. The communist state was supposed to provide unprecedented residential comfort, but at the same time introduce **socialist realist** architectural forms into the public space, thus emphasizing the **new political order**.



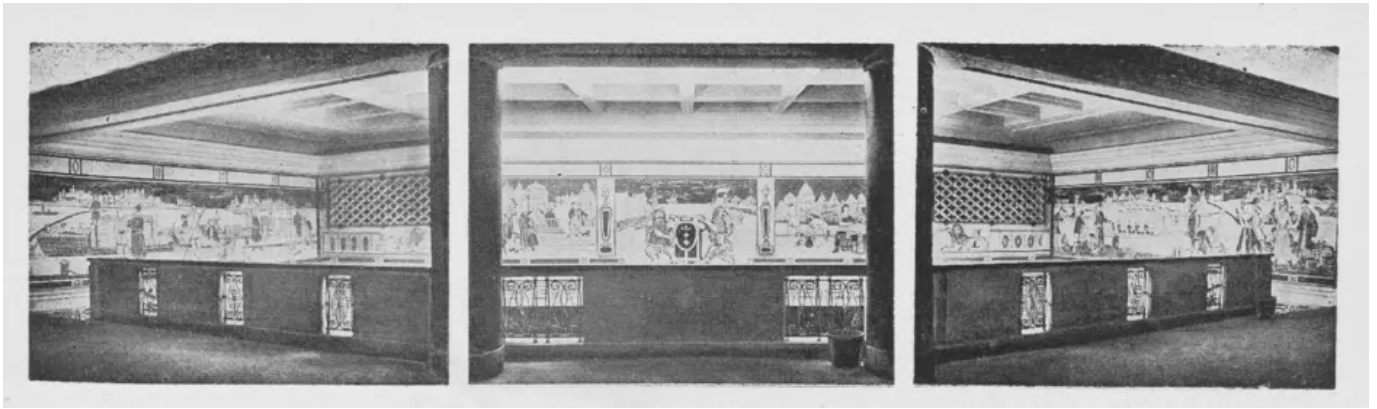
Socialist realism was conceived in the 1930s in the Stalinist Soviet Union, taking its inspiration from **classical** and **monumental** architecture, supplemented by a range of **ideological** motifs. Architecture (and urban planning) was meant to express the **power** of the **state** and of the **collective**. Workers were to take over the place of ancient heroes as protagonists of statues, frescoes and dramatic arts. Socialist realist buildings and entire neighborhoods were built in most Polish urban centres rebuilt after the war. The largest structures were developed in Warsaw, with the **Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science**, which took up a dozen blocks of the pre-war city. The rebuilt **Muranów** (the former Jewish ghetto razed to the ground by the Germans) and the **Marszałkowska Residential District (MDM)** were of the scale of almost entire cities. Similar estates were developed in Wrocław, Szczecin, Częstochowa and others taking over the functions of the new city centres. **Nowa Huta** near Krakow was actually planned as a completely new city – a symbol of post-war stalinist **industrialization**.





The development of GDM was a part of a larger nationwide project of post-war reconstruction: the Six Years Plan





However, socialist realism of Gdańsk's **Grunwald Residential District (GDM)** had its own peculiarities. There are far fewer direct references to historical styles here than in Warsaw or ornamentally opulent Nowa Huta. On the one hand, this is due to the fact that the field of action for the traditional craftsmen was the reconstruction of the Royal Road – ultimately one of the few spaces in the historic centre to be restored to its pre-war appearance or even "**more beautiful than ever**", as a kind of outdoor museum reminding that Gdańsk belongs to Poland and to **the working class**.



Leningrad movie theatre

The historic space of the old downtown has been cleared of the 'bourgeois' structures built during the 19th and 20th centuries and supplemented with new cinemas, post offices, hotels, office and administrative buildings with **socialist-realist** architectural features. Many surviving buildings have been demolished, lowered or altered in order to open up new viewing axes for parades and gatherings, **exposing historical monuments** related to the history Gdańsk as part of the quasi-republican Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1454-1793).

On the other hand, there was a clear **reluctance** of some architects trained before the war, as well as the young who had already graduated in the post-war Polish Gdańsk, to adhere strictly to the rules. It is worth adding that the rapidly **shrinking resources** definitely facilitated the rejection of the decor and a drift towards **simpler forms** resembling the late interbellic modernism of Warsaw's administrative buildings. For the same reasons, most projects of the **monumental structures** were abandoned: with the **cinema**, the **theatre**, the **community** and **administrative centre** of **GDM** to name but a few. Furthermore, it was decided to keep and **convert** many more pre-war buildings than originally planned. As a result most of the latter lost their turrets and gables with their large 'bourgeois' apartments being divided into smaller 'working class' flats, often with shared bathrooms or kitchens.



Sciana ekranowa. Fotografia z końca balkonu. Widoczna dekoracja ścienna (fresk) w wykonaniu art. mal. Hanny Zulawskiej.



Yanek
fotopolska.eu

Post Office



Kino Leningrad



The House of the Press



The School of Communication Technology

Socialist-realist buildings introduced into the historic centre of Gdańsk in the course of the post-war reconstruction, Hotel Jantar in the Long Market - the city's main square



Socialist-realist buildings introduced into the historic centre of Gdańsk in the course of the post-war reconstruction, Hotel Jantar in the Long Market - the city's main square



Key designers I/II stage

Józef Chmiel, Władysław Lew, Waław Rembiszewski, L. Maciejewski, **Daniel Olędzki**, Roman Hordyński, Jerzy Poklewski, Romuald Szurowski, Konrad Pławiński, Henryk Frey, Waław Tomaszewski, Janusz Morek, Ryszard Semka, Kazimierz Biszewski, Marian Bajdo, Czesław Świałkowski, Władysław Czerny, Józef Rogowski, Stanisław Sowiński, Kamil Lisowski



GDM's neon saying:
Gdańsk - the City of Flowers/Slayers

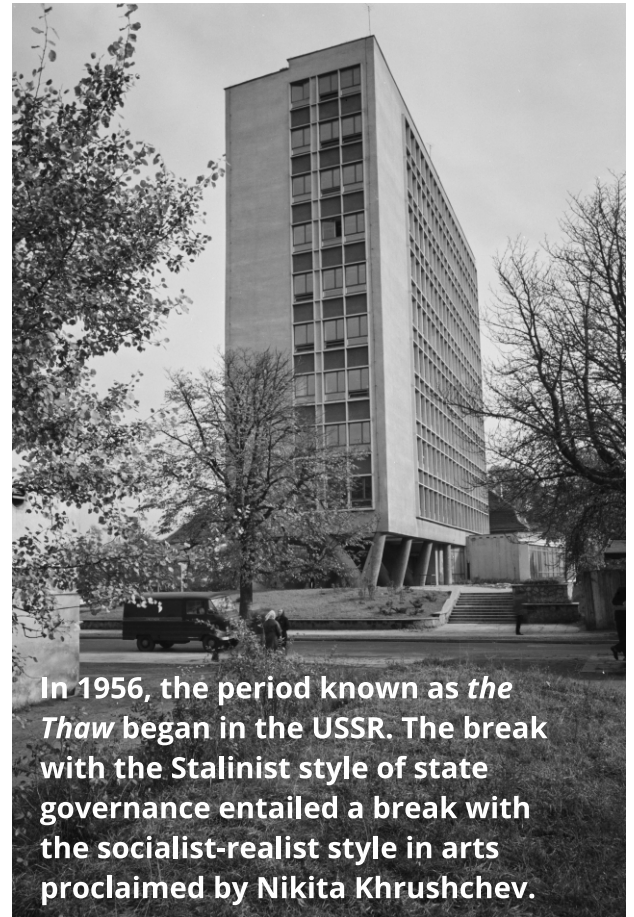
GDM in numbers

- 100 ha of development area,
- 316 000 m² of area of dwellings,
- 20 000 inhabitants,
- 61% new structures,
- 39% converted structures,
- 8 crèches, 7 kindergartens,
- 3 new schools, 4 day care centres,
- 3 library outlets, 1 cinema,
- 1 community centre with a 1200-seat auditorium,
- 1 children's clinic,
- 2 ambulatories,
- 3 underground toilets, garages for 209 cars.
- 14 passenger elevators
- 1 hotel, 1 railway station,
- 2 department stores,
- countless shops and restaurants,
- 8.1 km of new water supply system ,
- 3 km of new sewage system,
- 4 km of new drainage system
- 5.3 km of new heating network,
- 4 km of new gas network,
- 15 Trafo 500 KVa substations,
- 14 central heating boiler houses...

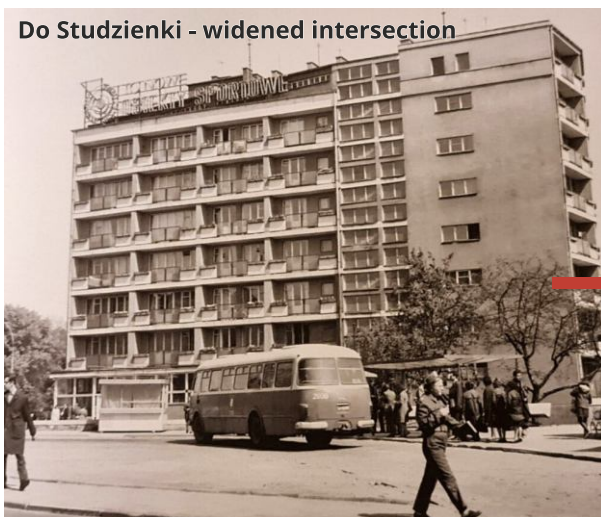
Planned demolition of 14 440 m³ of old or damaged structures in the first year of implementation.



Legendary *Olimp* or *Dolarowiec* highrise



In 1956, the period known as *the Thaw* began in the USSR. The break with the Stalinist style of state governance entailed a break with the socialist-realist style in arts proclaimed by Nikita Khrushchev.



Do Studzienki - widened intersection



Delicatessen frontage of Grunwaldzka str.



Office building, 1957 (demolished)

A stylistic liberation

In **Poland**, too the authorities associated with bloody repression stepped down and the power was handed over to **Władysław Gomułka**, himself a former victim of **stalinist repression**.



Ostentatiously modern early panel blocks of flats



The change of power and **social liberalisation** at the end of the 1950s allowed for an **open break** with the socialist-realist aesthetic, which was expressed in the construction of the ostentatiously modernist second phase of **Grunwald Residential District (GDM)**. Retail and restaurant buildings in the form of free-standing pavilions were then constructed and continuous frontages were abandoned in favour of **blocks of flats** standing in open spaces. However, the main compositional principles were maintained. These included the general grid featuring straightened and widened main street and its intersections with **pedestrian routes** connecting major green



areas running **independently**, away from main transit routes. The scale of the buildings has also been largely maintained.



GDM in Wrzeszcz was not the only major project planned as part of the rebuilding of Gdańsk after the war. A very similar example was the **Siedlce district**, where the widening and straightening of the main street and enclosing it with new frontages was also envisaged. The exception that distinguishes this estate from the others is the complete **uniformity of the facades** of the main street modelled after historical parisian solutions.



Neons of *Chemia* and *Pewex* buildings (demolished)



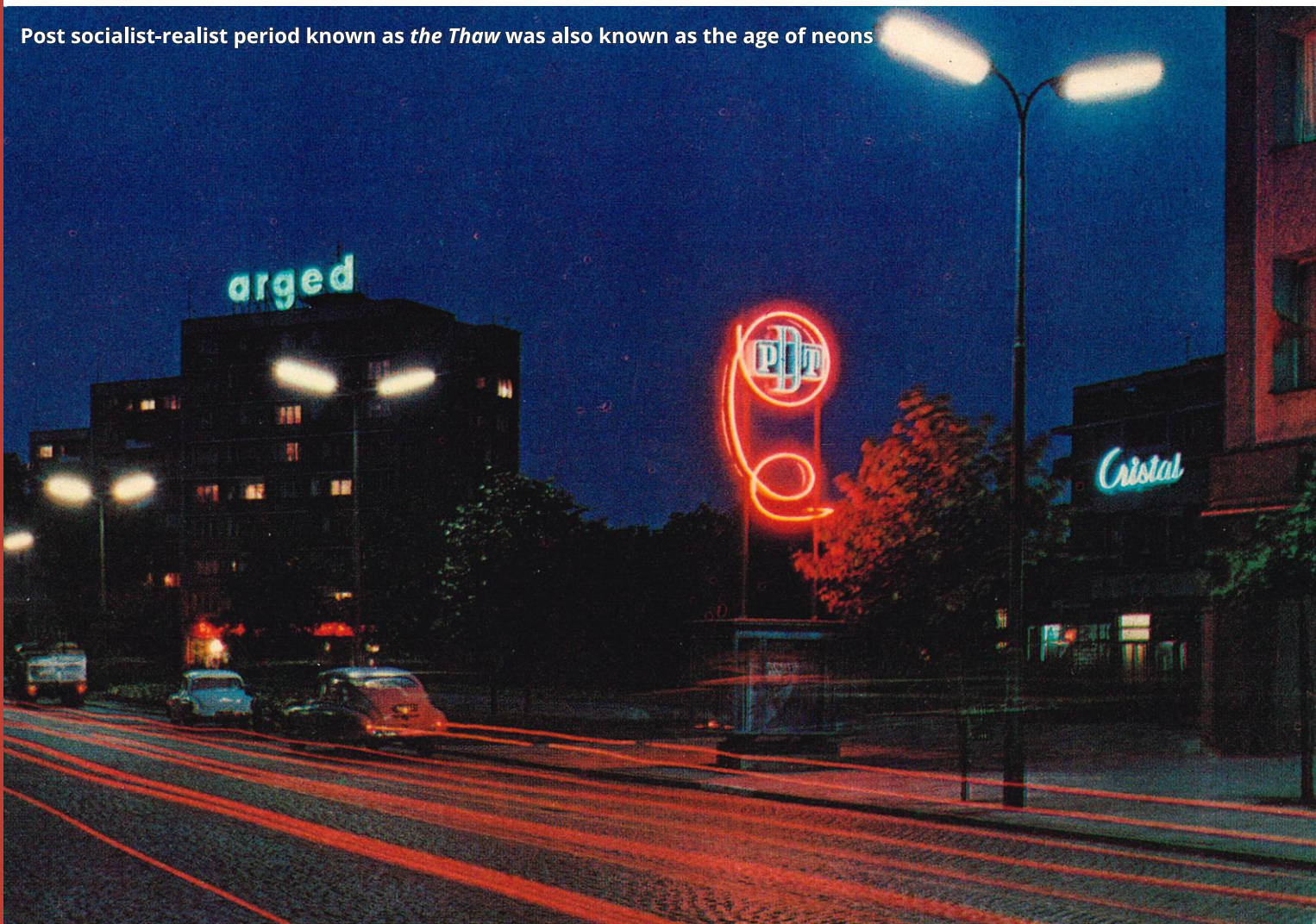
Cristal Café

Key designers
III stage - *the Thaw*

Daniel Olędzki,
Zbigniew
Czekanowski,
Janusz Sapiński,
Teodor Malczyk,
Witold Wierzbicki,
Wiesław Kobyliński



Post socialist-realist period known as *the Thaw* was also known as the age of neons



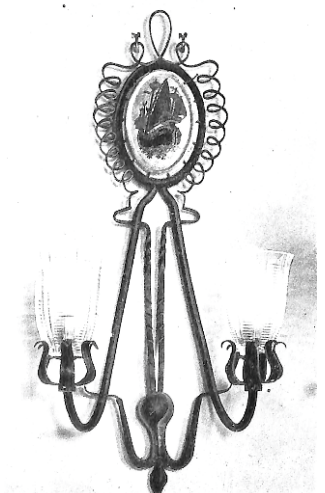
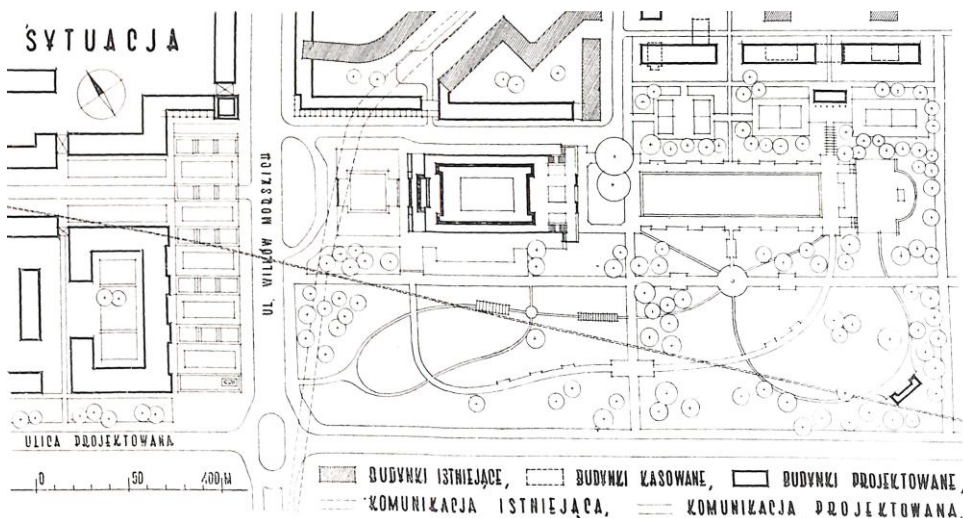
Unfortunately, this effect has been disturbed by the **individually executed renovations** of recent years. Here, too, it was decided to preserve a good deal of the pre-war development, which was only about 20 years old at the time. Moreover, its scale and urban grid were largely continued. Ultimately, the **socialist realist housing estates** were guided by similar principles to the modernist ones. The only difference was the decor and the communist state's ability to freely dispose of land ownership.

Identical concepts were adopted for the new quarters of such districts as Dolny Wrzeszcz - **Roosevelt Estate** and Strzyża - **Wojska Polskiego** (or Polish Army) Estate. In these cases, too, the pre-war urban concepts were largely continued, with modifications involving the creation of central squares and the construction of new school buildings, often on a monumental scale. Ultimately, this was only achieved in the case of the latter district. The **Roosevelt Estate** was already completed in prefabricated modernist forms, abandoning the original urban plans altogether.



A particular case is **Nowy Port**. A district that was created back in the 18th century close to the sea to take over the functions of the old port, which was already too small for modern ships. The destruction of the historic downtown granted this area a new opportunity. Even the relocation of the city's administrative centre here was considered. In the end, the district largely retained its former fabric but a number of new structures related to port functions was erected here along with housing for the employees. Uniquely, out of several community centres – **houses of culture** – envisaged in the aforementioned districts, only the **Maritime Cultural Centre** in Nowy Port lived to see its completion. However, the surrounding Central Square, rich in greenery, fountains and leisure facilities intended as a gateway to the district, did not.

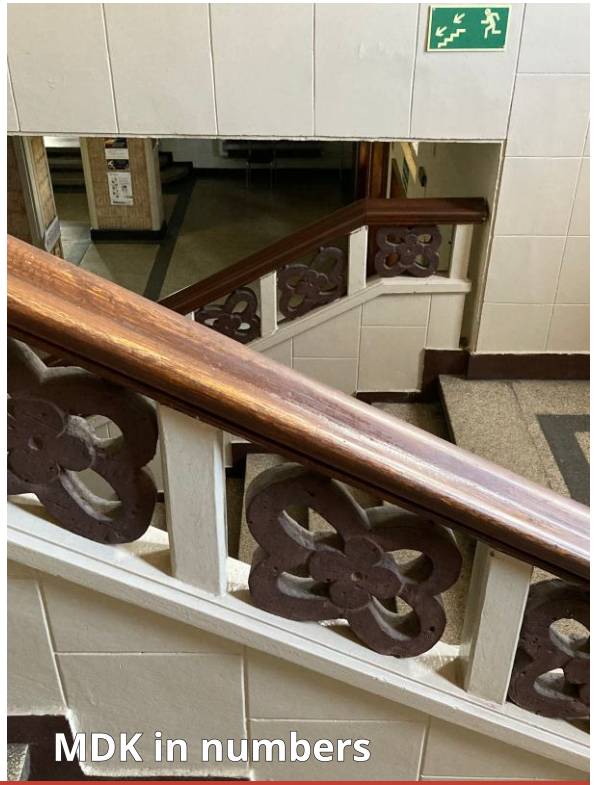
Morski Dom Kultury (MDK) - Maritime Cultural Centre and the never completed Central Square



fot. Szymon Jocek



Frescoes by Władysław and Bolesław Rogiński



MDK in numbers

Building volume 25 000 m³

A library of 190 m²

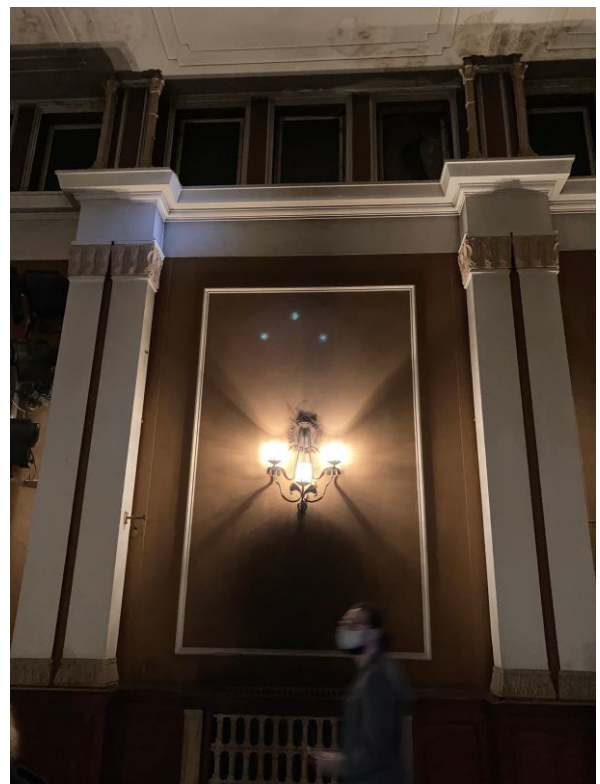
Gymnasium of approx. 100 m²

Hall with ticket offices 90 m²

Cinema hall with 296 seats



Lavishly decorated interiors of the Maritime Culture Centre (MDK)



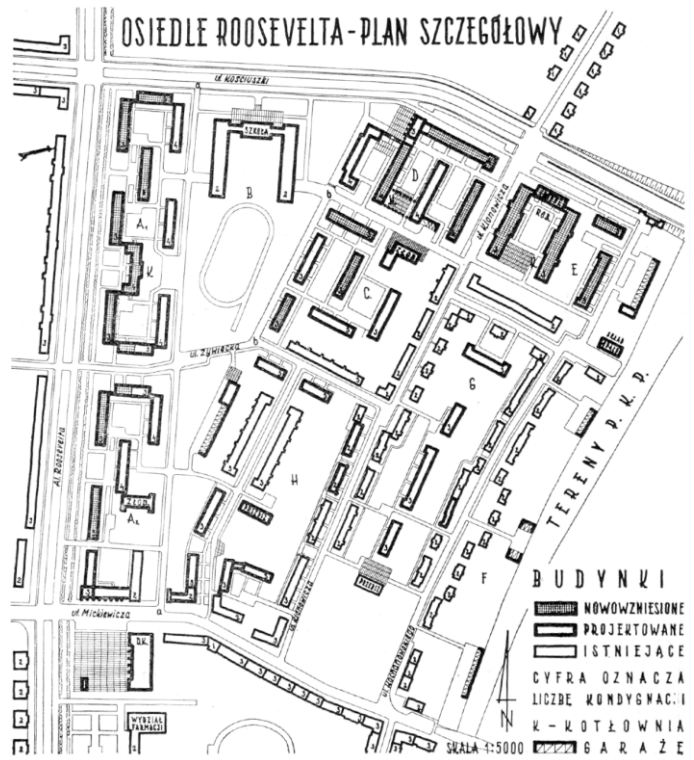
fot. Krzysztof Koprowski



Uniform facades of Kartuska street in Siedlce district, a feature that was lost due to individual renovations

Many more such **assembly squares** were planned in Gdansk. The most important of these was to close off the axis of the historical **Royal Road** from the east, i.e. from the side of Siedlce district. It was to be surrounded by monumental administrative buildings and the **Central House of Culture** of similar layout to the **Palace of Culture and Science** in Warsaw. None of the planned structures were ever erected. At the other end of this axis, however, a sports complex with a stadium, sports halls, swimming pool and green areas was planned. In the end, only the **Marathon Gate** was built - a kind of monumental tribune with a colonnade and a triumphal arch. Another gathering space whose architectural setting was also not finally completed was the People's Assembly Square with its band shell - demolished in recent years. Interestingly, this place envisaged as an entertainment space was immediately adjacent to a complex of war cemeteries, including the **Soviet War Memorial** featuring a one of a kind monument - the **Obelisco of Peace**.

The Navy Hospital in Oliwa



Roosevelt Estate in Dolny Wrzeszcz largely following an inter-war planning concept did not live to see its completion

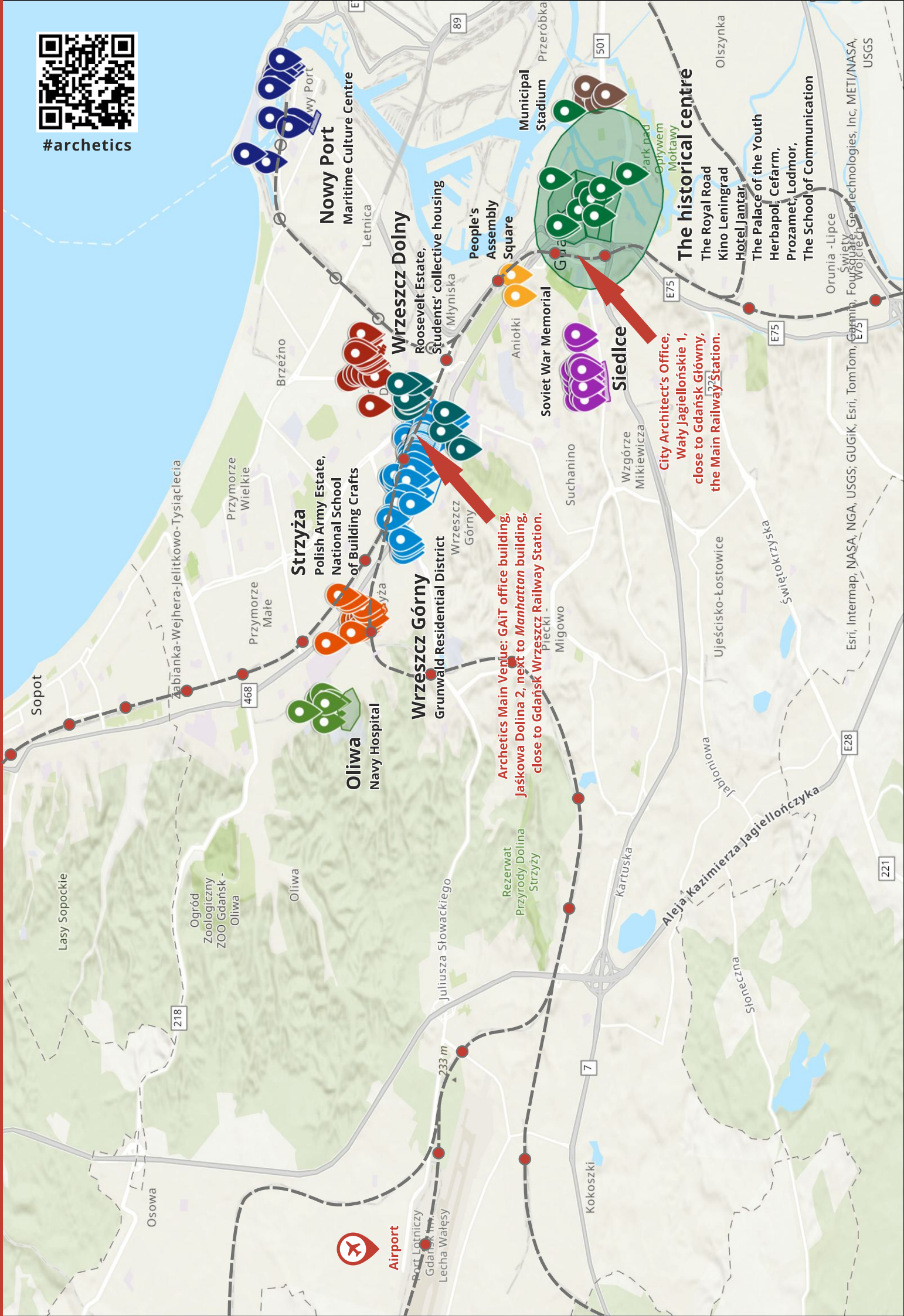
Other monuments of socialist realism are scattered around the city and feature mainly schooling facilities, collective housing for university students and finally a large medical complex built for the **Navy Hospital in Oliwa**. This palatial structure adjacent to the historic buildings of a 18th century suburban villa and the 1930s Forest Sanatorium is beautifully located - just below the woodland wall, once offering scenic perspectives and a sea breeze, which disappeared with the large-panel building housing estates realised in the 1960s and 1970s on the former coastal meadows.



The Municipal Stadium with the Marathon Gate



#archetics



Wrzeszcz Dolny

Wrzeszcz Górny

Strzyża

Oliwa

Nowy Port

Siedlce

The historical centre

Roosevelt Estate,
Students' collective housing

Polish Army Estate,
National School
of Building Crafts

Navy Hospital

Maritime Culture Centre

Archetics Main Venue: GAIT office building,
Jaškowa Dolina 2, next to Manhattan building,
close to Gdańsk Wrzeszcz Railway Station.

City Architect's Office,
Waly Jagiellońskie 1,
close to Gdańsk Główny,
the Main Railway Station.

Municipal Stadium

The historical centre
The Royal Road
Kino Leningrad
Hotel Jantar,
The Palace of the Youth
Herbapol, Cefarm,
Prozamet, Lodmor,
The School of Communication

Airport

Port Lotniczy
Gdańsk im.
Lecha Wałęsy

USGS

METI/NASA

Geotechnologies, Inc.

Orunia - Lipce

Święty Wojciech

Forum

Gdańsk

E75

E75

E28

221

7

501

89

468

218

233 m

Suchanino

Wzgórze Mikiewicza

Migowo

Plecki

Ujeścisko-Łostowice

Jabłonowa

Świętokrzyska

Aleja Kazimierza Jagiellończyka

Kartuska

Rezerwat Przyrody Dolina Strzyży

Juliusza Słowackiego

Oliwa

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