

# Gdynia Development Plans under the Guidance of Roman Feliński against a Background of His Urban Planning Work

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Gdynia development plans prepared in 1925-26 have long attracted the attention of researchers. It has been emphasized that they adequately shaped the city's spatial structure, while the zoning and the proposed expansion of districts outside the city centre, determined by practical implementation of the decentralization concept, are an instance of efficient application of modern town planning principles.

These plans were co-authored by Roman Feliński<sup>1</sup>, the man behind nearly 50 town development plans and over 150 building designs. Feliński has long been regarded as one of the founders of Polish urban planning guidelines, which he called town building principles<sup>2</sup>. Roman Feliński first encountered urban designing at the age of twenty-nine, when as a young architect he was working on numerous reconstruction projects in Galicia<sup>3</sup>. At that time, he prepared a wide range of local development plans for destroyed towns and cities. It was also at that time that he wrote the first Polish book on urban planning<sup>4</sup>. His next and slightly less popular publication *Miasta, wsie i uzdrowiska w sieci osiedleńczej kraju*<sup>5</sup> presented his opinions regarding modern town planning. Feliński summed up his career as an architect in a monumental three-volume

study on the theory of town development in Poland, but its manuscript, ready for publishing, was burned along with the architect's own house in 1944.

Roman Feliński also prepared designs of many significant buildings. His marriage to Rose (Róża) Ulam, who in the family records was officially called Rozalia Krzyżanowska née Baurewicz, a daughter of the prominent Jewish builder and developer Michał Ulam, secured him lucrative contracts with Jewish merchants and financial magnates in Lvov. As a 26-year-old architect, he designed a dozen or so monumental tenement houses in Lvov, built in the days of a construction boom in the capital city of the vast Galicia region<sup>6</sup>. At that time, Feliński was also the designer of the *Magnus* Department Store in Lvov, which already 40 years ago was widely acclaimed as the most modern building within the contemporary borders of Poland<sup>7</sup>. By 1918, Feliński had not only been engaged in a variety of designing and organizational projects, but had also earned a reputation of a renowned architect. This made his elder colleagues envious even then, and later it made his successors marginalize and disregard Feliński's output<sup>8</sup>.

1. Lewicki Jakub, *Roman Feliński architekt i urbanista. Pionier nowoczesnej architektury*, Warsaw 2007.

2. Feliński Roman, *Budowa miast z ilustracjami i planami miast*, Lvov 1916, pp. 5-7.

3. „Czasopismo Techniczne”, Lvov, 1915-1916. Cf. Jakub Lewicki, *Między tradycją a nowoczesnością. Architektura Lwowa 1893-1918*, Warsaw 2007, pp. 438-452.

4. Feliński Roman, *Budowa miast z ilustracjami i planami miast*, Lvov 1916, Published by Księgarnia Gubrynowicz i syn, p. 114.

5. Feliński Roman, *Miasta, wsie, uzdrowiska w osiedleńczej organizacji kraju z 105 rycinami*, Warsaw 1935, Published by Nasza Księgarnia. S. A. Związku Nauczycielstwa Polskiego, p. 248.

6. Lewicki J., *Roman Feliński...*, op. cit., p. 317, 319, 324, 331, 346-351.

7. Olszewski Andrzej K., *Nowa forma w architekturze polskiej 1900-1925. Teoria i praktyka*, Wrocław 1967, pp. 86-88, 169-172, 183-189, 198-200.

8. This refers to Ignacy Drexler, among others. For example accounts of Roman Feliński's activity in 1914-1918 were never mentioned in the anniversary report published by Polskie Towarzystwo Politechniczne [Polish Applied Science Association] co-edited by Ignacy Drexler despite the fact that in 1914-1918 the Lvov periodical „Czasopismo Techniczne”, which was the Association's major publication, on a current basis reported on Feliński's numerous initiatives and actions. Cf. *Polskie*



1. Sądowa Wisznia, "a general regulation outline", by Roman Feliński 1917, an example of the architect's early regulation design. After: Feliński 1935, p. 151, fig. 87.

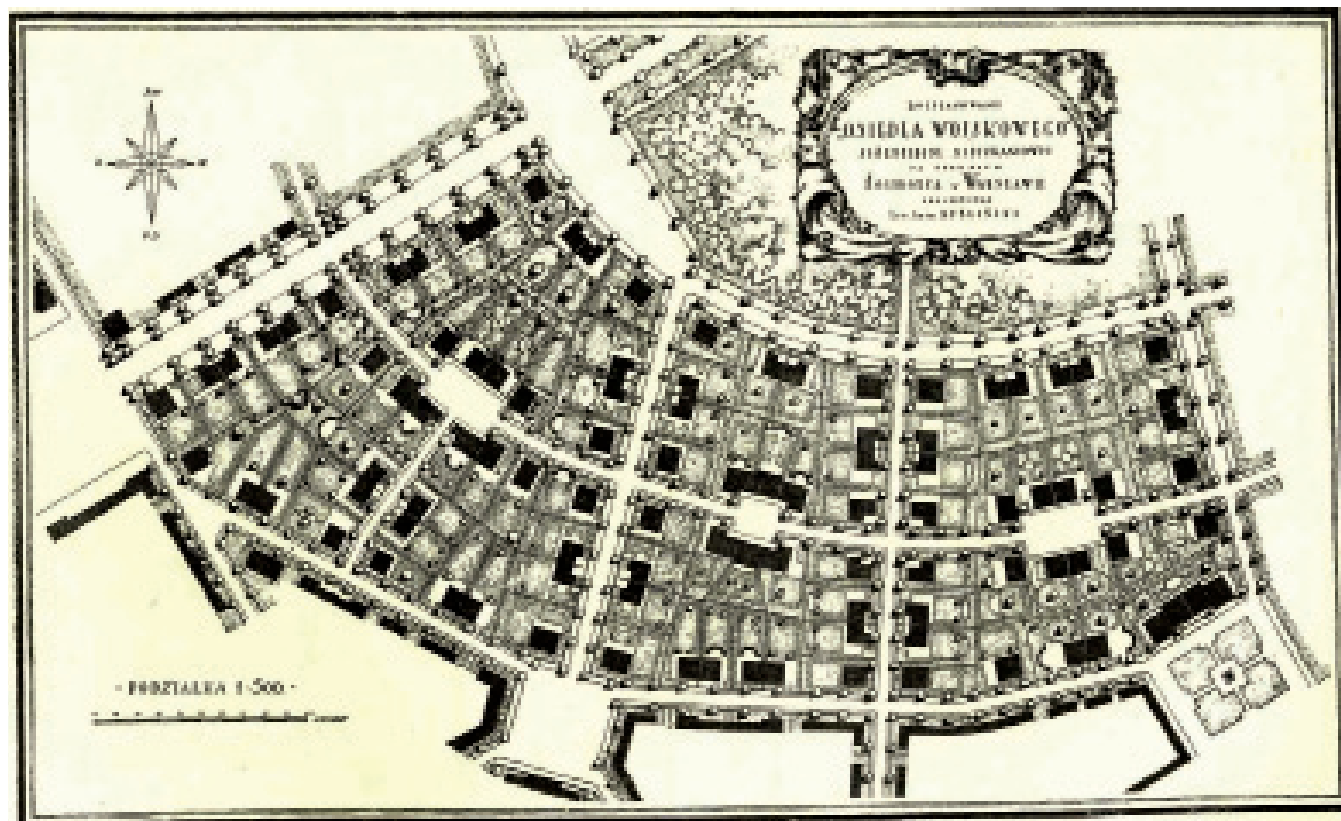
In 1918, Feliński along with other most talented architects left Lvov – the capital of Galicia now downgraded to a regional capital, and went to Warsaw – the newly promoted

capital of a rapidly growing state. Together with other outstanding figures of Lvov architecture – Stefan Bryła and Alfred Zachariewicz – Feliński became an established Warsaw architect. As of 1919, he worked as Head of the Civil Engineering Department at the Ministry of Public Works and organized the Department of Towns and Health Resorts. He was also standing Deputy Director of the Civil Engineering Department responsible for professional issues. Feliński held the position until June 1926, when, following his protest against the coup d'état of the previous month and his denial of access to the Ministry of Public Works to members of the new authority, he was forced to withdraw into lifelong retirement at the age of 39. The departments at the Ministry of Public Works headed by Feliński served as significant centres of urban planning expertise. Around 30 local development plans of entire towns as well as their extensive regulation requirements were compiled under Feliński's guidance between 1919 and 1926. Gdynia development plans were also prepared at the time. Furthermore, Feliński initiated the first regional plans in Poland. His accomplishments were duly recognized abroad as his works displayed in 1925 in Paris were awarded an Honorary Diploma. Regrettably, after 1926, there was no room for Feliński in public service despite his undeniable achievement and abilities. Throughout 1919-26, Roman Feliński remained the most influential Polish architect in public service.<sup>9</sup> His significance is further

Towarzystwo Politechniczne we Lwowie 1877-1927. Księga Pamiątkowa, edited by Maksymilian Matakiewicz, Lvov 1927.

9. Lewicki J., Roman Feliński..., op. cit., pp. 18, 20, 120-127, 140-141.

2. Warsaw, Żoliborz, "Layout of the Housing Co-operative "Military Estate" in the district of Żoliborz in Warsaw", designed by Roman Feliński, before 1925. After Feliński 1935, p. 99, fig. 65. Cf. Fig. 13





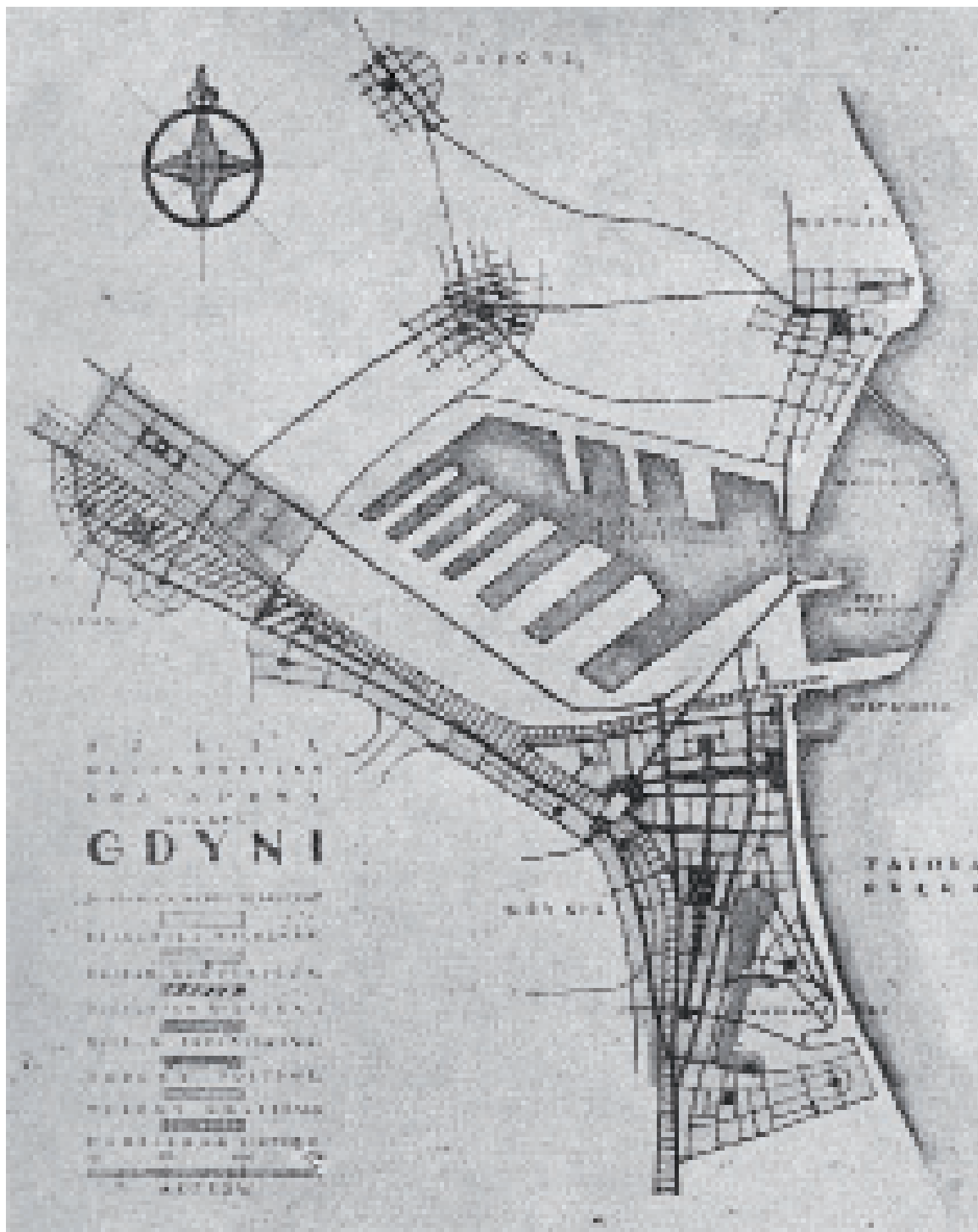
**3.** Gdynia, Disorderly city development. **a.** City centre; **b.** Working-class district, the so-called, Pekin. Status as in 1934. Photo: H. Poddębski. After Feliński 1935, pp. 192-193, fig. 101-102.

demonstrated by the fact that almost all buildings shortlisted as model residential structures before 1926, were developed on the basis of designs

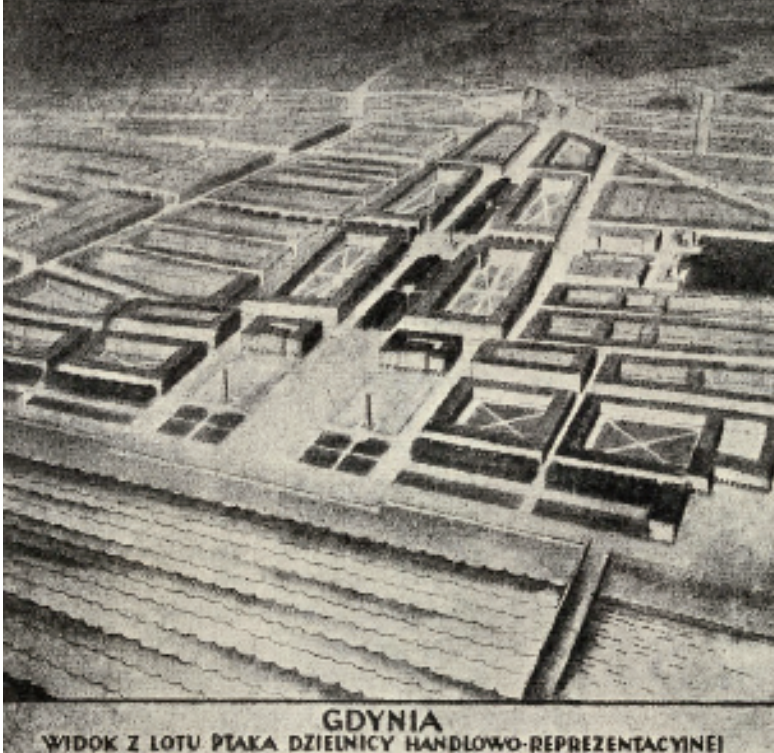
and guidelines provided by Roman Feliński<sup>10</sup>.

10. Lewicki J., *Roman Feliński...*, op. cit., frontispiece *Wisznia*,

**4.** Gdynia, Orientation sketches of the development, designed by Adam Kuncewicz under the guidance of Roman Feliński, developed by Section 8 of the Civil Engineering Department at the Ministry of Public Works, 1925-26. After "Architektura i Budownictwo" I, 1925, no. 2 (September), p. 13.







**GDYNIA**  
WIDOK Z LOTU PTAKA DZIELNICY HANDLOWO-REPREZENTACYJNEJ

6. Gdynia, Design of a shopping district and urban centre drawn up by Adam Kuncewicz under the guidance of Roman Feliński in Section 8 of the Civil Engineering Department at the Ministry of Public Works, May 1926. After "Architektura i Budownictwo" II, 1926, no. 2 (August), p. 14.

Feliński's designing method had already formed by that time. It is best illustrated by his earliest designs. The 1917 layout of Sądowa Wisznia (Fig. 1) is marked by zoning, erection of a new central area, location of residential buildings near work places and also by wedging in belts of green areas<sup>11</sup>. Another characteristic feature is the introduction of numerous markets as well as green areas designated as recreational grounds for the residents. Feliński moved major transport routes out of the city centre and secured efficient connections between individual districts.

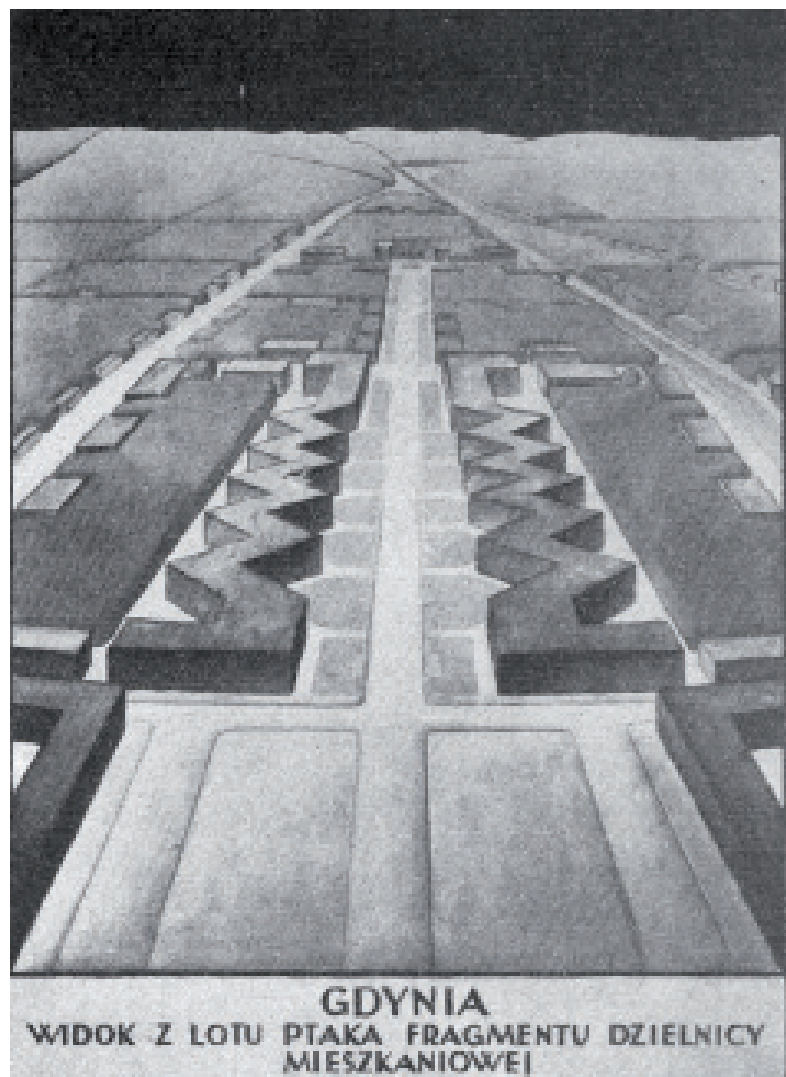
Prior to the Gdynia development plans, Feliński prepared local plans for the Warsaw district of Ochota (Fig. 8-9) and parts of Żoliborz (Fig. 2) and Bielany<sup>12</sup> - never attributed to him. The layout and housing forms in this part of the city were markedly distinctive. His design provided for numerous symmetrical layouts filled with well-spaced housing of clearly defined axes and a well-thought arrangement of small yards surrounded by the houses. Free-standing buildings were precisely located along the meticulously designed streets (Fig. 8-12), the pattern of which was emphasized by the location of the buildings. The buildings varied in size and functional programme - ranging from small, modest, two-storey houses situated along the building line, to higher buildings set back from

<sup>11</sup> "the outline regulations", prepared by Roman Feliński 1917, an example of Feliński's early regulation plan. After Feliński 1935, p. 151, fig. 87.

<sup>12</sup> Feliński R., *Miasta, wsie...*, op. cit., p. 151.

<sup>12</sup> Lewicki J., *Roman Feliński...*, op. cit., pp. 120-124.

the frontage line, thus creating small squares that livened up the entire layout and determined its composition. Small two- or three-storey houses with zoned heights prevailed. The most distinct feature of the designed urban compositions was the introduction of green areas inside the lots (Fig. 8; 13), which provided recreational grounds for residents. Built-up space would normally cover up to 40 percent of the whole quarter and comprised two parallel blocks. Another element frequently used by Feliński was the precise delineation of the back building line, which corresponded with his approach to shaping housing developments. The remaining area of the quarter was filled with greenery stretching throughout the designed front gardens. Additionally, small squares for recreational purposes were wedged in between the buildings. All those details lent a characteristic quality to Feliński's urban planning projects. The layout of the above-mentioned districts followed the pattern of garden cities and "garden districts".



**GDYNIA**  
WIDOK Z LOTU PTAKA FRAGMENTU DZIELNICY MIESZKANIOWEJ

7. Gdynia, Plan of a residential district drawn up by Adam Kuncewicz under the guidance of Roman Feliński in Section 8 of the Civil Engineering Department at the Ministry of Public Works, May 1926. After "Architektura i Budownictwo" II, 1926, no. 2 (August), p. 13.



8. Warsaw, Ochota, Block development bounded by streets Anińska, Filtrowa and Orzechowska, designed by Roman Feliński, ca. 1925. After Feliński 1935, p. 86, Fig. 45.

Another major inspiration of Feliński's work was low-cost housing broadly discussed in his books and studies (e.g. the design of a housing settlement dated from 1916 - Fig. 13). At the Ministry of Public Works, where Feliński had a job, a large number of town planning projects that included corresponding elements of urban planning composition were made.

Roman Feliński's best known accomplishment were the Gdynia development plans (Fig. 4-7) from 1925-1926<sup>13</sup>, which were widely

13. Major publications in chronological order: Teresa Zarębska, *Urbanistyczne aspekty twórczości Oskara Sosnowskiego*, "Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki" XXXV, 1990, vol. 3-4, p. 253, 253, 256, 258, 259, 264, 266; Maria Sołtysik, *Gdynia - miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Urbanistyka i architektura*, Warsaw 1993, pp. 94-105, 119-126, 148-151, 154, 174-178, 280, 378; Maria Sołtysik, *Na styku dwóch epok. Architektura gdynskich kamienic okresu międzywojennego*, Gdynia 2003, pp.

acclaimed as the most rational plans of the city. They were jointly developed by Roman Feliński and Adam Kuncewicz. As early as in the 1920s it was repeatedly said that no design solutions existed for the city centre, that new housing was disorderly, but first and foremost, that districts of poverty and shantytowns were mushrooming (Fig. 3).

It was therefore necessary that professional local plans be prepared. These plans have been examined by Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, who discusses their characteristics and presents relevant facts<sup>14</sup>. Whoever is interested may read the publication for him/herself.

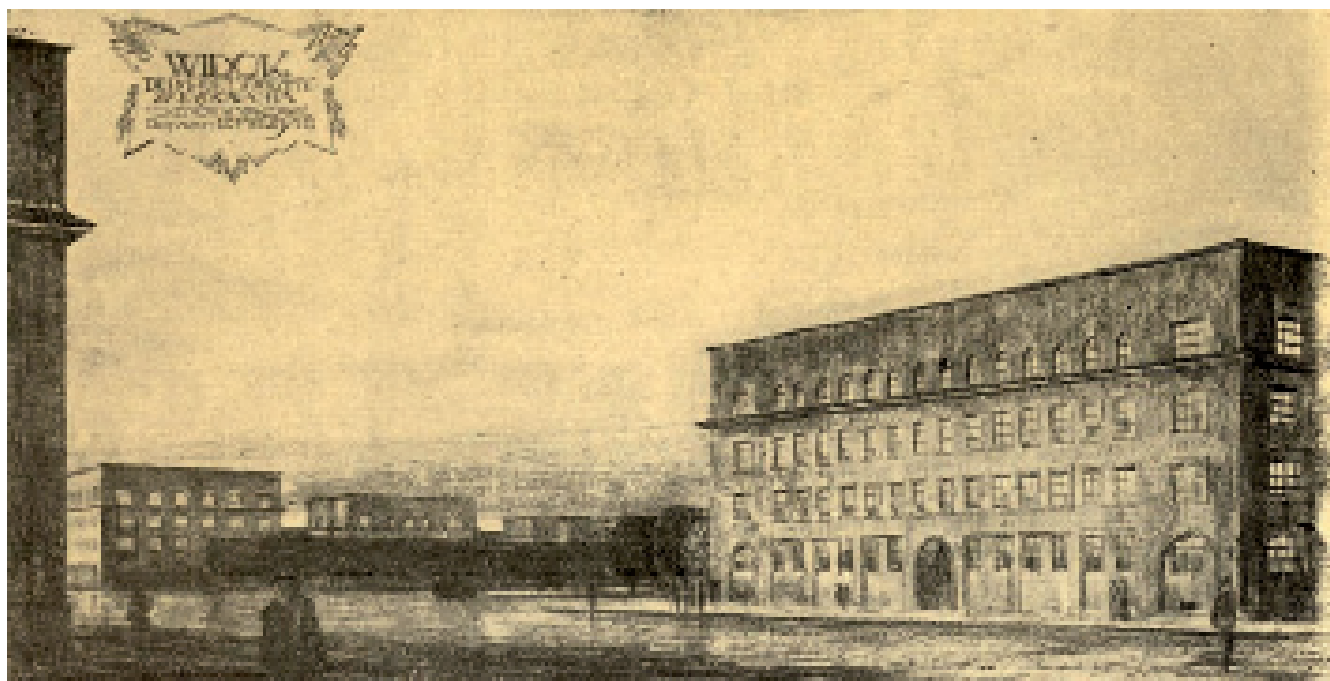
Town planning designs prepared by Feliński and Kuncewicz comprised an orientation plan, then a local plan and a prospective plan (Fig. 4-7). They also provided for detailed planning solutions for the grand district of the city and of the main part of the residential district. While working on Gdynia local plans, Feliński drew on his previous reflections on the shaping of a housing development. The composition of the Gdynia plan<sup>15</sup> resembled his earlier design for the Warsaw district of Ochota (Fig. 8-12). Identical solutions included a strong dominant axis (Fig. 8), parts of green areas as well as zoning of heights within individual blocks, which were mainly completed before 1930. A similar principle was employed in the layout of well-spaced buildings with the surrounding greenery. This was a deliberately applied measure determined by the architect's beliefs. In his designs, Roman Feliński used his

21, 47-48; K. Stępiński, *Nadmorskie centrum portowego miasta*, „Spotkania z Zabytkami” XXVII, 2003, no. 2, pp.16-17.

14. Maria Sołtysik, *Gdynia - miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego...*, op. cit., pp. 94-105, 119-126, 148-151, 154, 174-178, 280, 378.

15. Cf. plans reproduced in "Architektura i Budownictwo" annual vol. I, 1925, no. 2 (September), p. 13; annual vol. II, 1926, no. 2 (August), pp. 12, 13, 14.

9. Warsaw, Block development bounded by streets Anińska, Filtrowa and Orzechowska, designed by Roman Feliński, ca. 1925. After "Architektura i Budownictwo" II, 1926, no. 2 (August), p. 31.

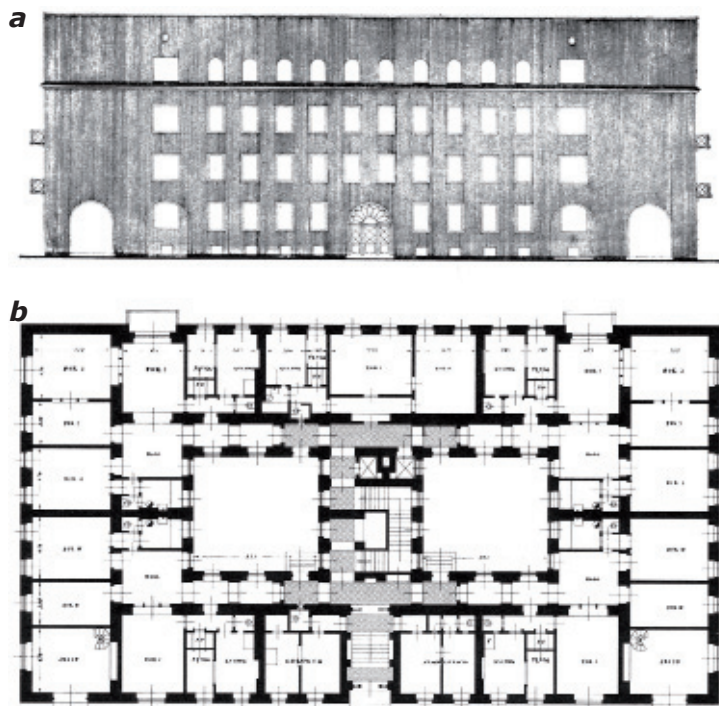


own method of urban development. His designs typically include zoning of the project in terms of scale and function, wedging-in green areas between quarters and inside blocks, moving city centre functions to more peripheral areas and designing new thoroughfares taking heavy traffic away from the city centre. Feliński has always paid special attention to green areas introduced in the form of wedge-shaped belts or small squares situated in the vicinity of apartment buildings. He also used aerial photographs for urban planning purposes and he did so in the case of Gdynia, too.

Roman Feliński's planning concepts can also be traced in his other designs. They show what Gdynia might look like, had its development plans and buildings been designed by Roman Feliński and had his ideas lived on after 1926.

A strong centrally drawn axis was also designed in the Warsaw district of Ochota (Fig. 8)<sup>16</sup>. It featured an identical axis emphasized by two sizable obelisks placed at both ends, a large square at one end and also a significant widening of the axis broken off by streets symmetrically perpendicular to the axis (Fig. 8-9, 11-12). The layout of perpendicular streets which delineated the position of successive side streets as well as zoning of the development were exactly the same. The axis of Ochota, as in the case of Gdynia, was accentuated by characteristic, large five-storey buildings of cubic shape (Fig. 8-11). Lower buildings were located slightly further away together with large green areas (Fig. 12). In Ochota, they were predominantly shaped by traditional architectural forms. Further back, low-rise free standing buildings of geometric shapes were designed. Identical forms were also built in the central part of Ochota, where a strong axis reached as far as Warsaw's water filtering plant. Large buildings of similar forms were built in other parts of the district – in the present streets of Wawelska, Niepodległości (former Topolowa) and Słupecka. Gdynia development plans provided for green areas to fill in the housing blocks or to cut across the entire composition in the form of wedges, much the same as in the case of Feliński's Warsaw designs.

The intriguing factor in the Gdynia design is the absence of several elements characteristic of Feliński's style. Firstly, there are no bow-shaped streets so typical of his later plans. In Gdynia, they were used no earlier than in the development plan of western part of Oksywie, designed by Adam Kuncewicz in 1928<sup>17</sup>, and formulated in line with the principles of Feliński's



10. Warsaw, Town house at 63 Filtrowa, designed by Roman Feliński, ca. 1924. **a.** Façade; **b.** plan. After Feliński 1935, p. 87, Fig. 46 and 47.

style. It is of key importance that streets perpendicular to major roads were designed, which was hardly ever used by Feliński. Their layout was determined by adjusting Gdynia plans to the existing grid of streets.

Secondly, the manorial style and a wide range of its variations were absent from the city centre plan prepared by Kuncewicz and Feliński. The latter had extensively used this type of buildings in his earlier plans (Fig. 13-14), but Gdynia development plan was drawn up at a time of a breakthrough and departure from architectural forms that were already considered anachronistic. Feliński's designs developed at that time were greatly inspired by the Art Déco forms (Fig. 12). They mostly comprised two-storey buildings and it is possible that such forms were also proposed in the development plans for Gdynia. The introduction of new forms therefore clearly shows a considerable extent of modern thinking in Roman Feliński's designing approach.

Feliński formulated his local development plans for Gdynia on the basis of his own town building method. Its distinguishing features were a precise statistical and graphic analysis of the existing development, the zoning according to scale and function as well as the introduction of wedge-shaped green belts between quarters and inside housing blocks. It was also important to preserve the function of the city centre while relocating some of its functions to other districts and drawing new transportation routes taking some of the traffic away from the centre.

16. Feliński Roman, *Miasta, wsie, uzdrowiska...*, op. cit., p.86, Fig. 45.

17. The plan was first published in: Sołtysik Maria., *Gdynia - miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego...*, op. cit., p. 175, Fig. 83.



**11.** Warsaw, View of a house at 63, Filtrowa designed by Roman Feliński, ca. 1924.

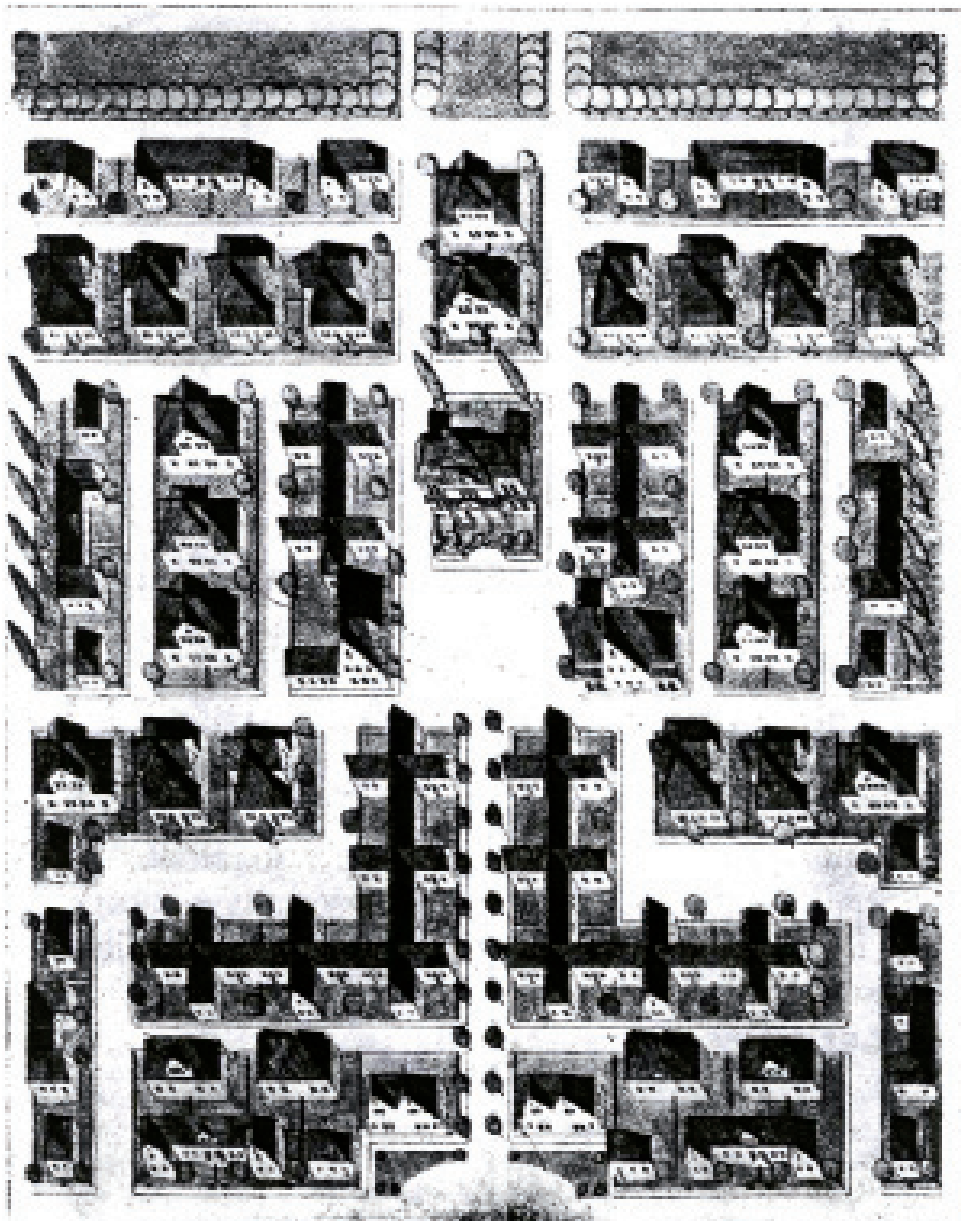


**12.** Warsaw, House at 3, Orzechowska built to Roman Feliński's concept, ca.1925, After Feliński 1935, p. 88, fig. 48. Cf. Fig. 8.

Another typical trait was axial urban planning compositions emphasized by squares and green areas surrounded by other buildings. This concept evidently followed the pre-1920

German town planning doctrine and was a result of the extensive knowledge of the German urban planning achievement of 1910-1926 and the repetition of their solutions. It is worth noting

**13.** Fragment of working-class housing settlement on flat land designed by Roman Feliński, 1911. After Feliński 1916, p. 73, Fig. 19





that Feliński made an extensive use of aerial photography for urban planning and designing purposes, which was a very advanced method at the time. Undoubtedly, he not only co-authored the plans and greatly influenced their form, but above all, he initiated the preparation of a comprehensive Gdynia development plan in Section 8 (responsible for regulation) of the Civil Engineering Department at the Ministry of Public Works, which he then headed. While he was working for the Ministry of Public Works, Feliński initiated the preparation of local plans for other towns and cities. As a result of identifying needs and requirements specific to this area, which was the focus of attention at the Ministry of Public Works as well as the Polish Urban Planners' Society, of which he was the first President, Feliński gained extensive knowledge and expertise of issues related to urban planning. He also pioneered other regulation projects for towns and cities as well as model residential quarters to be built in the developing towns.

Roman Feliński's work on Gdynia development plans was suddenly discontinued by his leaving the Ministry of Public Works following the events of 26 May 1926 in Poland. As a supporter of the former ruling camp, he was forced into early retirement at the age of 39, which in practical terms amounted to being expelled from public service. He was no longer in the position to create development plans of the new city. However, he was still able to influence their form and he knew about all the details of the continued work on the city plans thanks to his friendship with Adam Kuncewicz, who developed subsequent urban planning designs for Gdynia. Feliński also stayed in touch with many planners working on Gdynia development plans. Some of them lived or run their design studios in the Warsaw district of Ochota, near Feliński's own house and office. Feliński's extensive social network is well reflected by the fact that the building erected to his design (at 63, Filtrowa street, Ochota, Warsaw – Fig. 9-11) was the first headquarters of an association gathering Polish architects. The building was also home to several renowned architects. As of 1926, Feliński ran his own architectural and urban planning studio, which carried on until 1944, where he hired a number of his young fellow architects and worked on other local development plans as well as numerous designs of new residential buildings and housing settlements. Local development plans of many Polish towns and cities were conceived at his office. It is hardly possible that he neither designed nor participated in the preparation of Gdynia development plans. So far no design prepared by Feliński has been discovered, which does not mean this will not happen in the future.



**14.** Warsaw, Żoliborz, Housing Co-operative "Military Estate" designed by Roman Feliński **a.** Small square in the layout axis, Dygasińskiego street; **b.** Building at 9, Promyka; **c.** Typical building at 16, Dygasińskiego. Photo: J. Lewicki 2006.

In conclusion, it should be stressed that Gdynia development plans not only comprised the latest scientific solutions in town planning and development, but also Feliński's thoughts and ideas regarding modern housing development. Also the designs never put into practice, bearing the names of Roman Feliński and his junior colleague Adam Kuncewicz, are a testimony of the vast experience and great designing skills of this Polish pioneer of modern architecture and urban planning.

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