

Modern City Centre: Evolution of the Idea of Gdynia's "Premiere District" 1926-2007

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In the interwar period, i.e. in the 1920s and 1930s, the modern city centre as an urban planning issue was rarely the subject of realisation works.¹ In comparison with large-scale housing projects, both in Poland and throughout Europe, the construction of new city centres was rare. Moreover, the message of some kind of monumentalism and symbolism associated with the city centre concept was ideologically alien to the interwar avant-garde. Self-confessed Modernists were mainly fascinated by functional and social aspects of modern urban planning. A clear-cut example of such an approach was Le Corbusier's ideal city designs: *Ville Contemporaine*, *Plan Voisin* and *Ville Radieuse*, where the central district was composed of several identical skyscrapers, set rhythmically within green belts. This approach was also reflected in famous guidelines of the 1933 Athens Charter. It did not change until the mid-1930s, when the ideas of symbolism and grandness became important again.

In this context, the origin and evolution of the concept of Gdynia's "Premiere District" is an interesting issue. From the design work point of view, it can be compared with the concept of the Marshal Józef Piłsudski District in Warsaw, although construction of the latter never started. The Gdynia's district, however, is unique (both in European and global scale) because of its location within an attractive landscape between the city and the sea. As a matter of fact, the whole city of Gdynia is a unique urban planning phenomenon, as it was built from scratch to become a city with a population of 120,000 within some twenty interwar years. In terms of construction pace, scale and style, certain historical and spatial similarities can be found between Gdynia and the capital of Israel, Tel Aviv.

Gdynia's "Premiere District" is a place associated with the legend and history of the city. It differs from thousands of other locations in that it is a specific symbol which Gdynia residents identify themselves with. The core of the site is the urban planning axis, which opens the city centre to the sea, i.e., Skwer Kościuszki and Molo Południowe (South Pier) together with the Yacht Basin and adjacent areas at its base. The construction of the district started on a spectacular scale in the 1930s; the district was designed to be the spatial heart of Gdynia, with a square and a good view of the sea. Its shape architecturally linked the city with the port and the coastal landscape, "to bring together the border contained in rock and water, thus creating a unity of deep value and symbolism", as somebody wrote at the

time. The implementation of the project went according to a carefully planned design until the outbreak of World War II. Although the war halted the project, its concept kept living in people's memory. Later, after the war, the idea was brought up several times, but the project was not continued. Our generation – Gdynia citizens of the early 21st century – is the next one to raise the issue by planning the construction of a prestigious cultural centre here. Therefore, the concept of Gdynia's "Premiere District" is the same age as the city itself.

Origins of 10 Lutego street and Skwer Kościuszki (Kościuszki Square) layout (1904-1925)

In order to learn the origin of the layout of Gdynia's "Premiere District" – or rather its first component, i.e. Skwer Kościuszki – we must go back to the beginning of the 20th century, when Gdynia was no more than a village. At that time, a small summer resort was built south of the village. *Ostseebad-Genossenschaft Gdingen*² (Baltic Sea Spa Association Gdynia), a company established in March 1904, built a lido right by the beach; the lido consisted of a two-storey Spa Hotel (Kurhaus), baths for men and women and a small, fifty-metre-long wooden pier.

2. *Aus dem Kreise, Gdingen*, "Naustädter Kreis-Zeitung", 1904, No. 34 and 37.

1. Gdynia's Kurhaus complex in 1908, after Kurhausweg Street (later 10 Lutego) was marked out. A fragment of the topographic map (Königl. Preuss, Landesaufnahme 1908) published in 1909, Oxhoeft. From the collection of Gdańsk PAN Library



1. This issue is also discussed by Jadwiga Roguska, who says that interwar studies on this topic were of theoretical nature mainly, and, as a rule, were not put into practice. See: Roguska, J., *The Concepts of City Centre before and after World War II*, [in:] *Modernism in Europe – Modernism in Gdynia. Architecture of 1920s and 1930s and Its Protection*, Maria Jolanta Sołtysik and Robert Hirsch (eds.), Gdynia 2009, pp. 21-30.



2. Aerial photograph taken in 1925. In the foreground: the complex of Gdynia summer resort with the Spa Hotel, park, 10 Lutego Street with summer houses. From the collection of the Gdynia City Museum

The lido sea summer resort covered a nearly rectangular 2.5 hectare plot, about 80 metres wide and 310 metres long, extending between the beach boundary and what is now Świętojańska Street. Kurhaus itself was erected in the centre of the plot and was surrounded by a small terraced park descending to the sandy beach (Fig. 1). Originally, the building was accessed by a narrow road running from Droga Św. Jańska (as the present Świętojańska Street was called at the time) along the northern boundary of the plot.

Two or three years later (but certainly before 1908), a new access road to Kurhaus was built. It ran from the railway station, bypassing the rural settlement on the south, then straight east across Gdynia's farms, to the very building. The road was first called Kurhausweg, then Kurhausstrasse or Kurhausallee, and finally street or avenue Kuracyjna.

By the standards of the day, it was designed with a dash: twelve metres wide and consisting of a central sandy roadway (6 metres wide), flanked by two pathways, each double-lined with trees. This ambitious, avenue-like layout together with the lido marked the beginning of the summer resort; in the 1920s, holiday villas and boarding houses were built in the street planned in this way (Fig. 2).

Conditions for intensive urban development, however, did not emerge until the city was founded; within its fabric, Kuracyjna charted the future 10 Lutego and the Kurhaus site delineated the future Skwer Kościuszki.

An idea is born: The Maritime Forum (1926)

Gdynia's first urban development plans were made in 1925. They were created in the Ministry of Public Works in Warsaw by two architects and planners: Roman Feliński, the head of Division VIII (Regulations) of the Civil Engineering Department at the time, and his associate, Adam Kuncewicz. Roman Feliński was already a recognised architect and the author of one of the first books ever published in Poland on town-building; Adam Kuncewicz, one generation younger, was a researcher and junior lecturer at the Department of Architecture, Warsaw University of Technology. In the concept³ they presented in May 1926, the main planning idea for Gdynia appeared for the first time: the idea of opening the city's central part to the sea. It became the leitmotif of all subsequent plans of the city centre, underlying all layout proposals for an elegant waterfront ever since.

As the main central axis, the architects designed an elaborate seabound thoroughfare, running between the boundary of the port under construction and the old village, more or less along the line of the present Wójta Jana Radtkego Street. It started as a square in front of the railway station, then turning into gradually widening streets/avenues (from

thirty to sixty metres), to end as a huge waterfront square of about 120 by 230 metres (Fig. 3). Here was the culmination of the spatial layout – the Maritime Forum – with its longer side adjacent to the seashore and marked with two obelisks. Its shape had clearly been inspired by Europe's most famous waterfront squares: Piazzetta di San Marco in Venice and Praça do Comércio in Lisbon. On the other hand, the idea of the view over the sea gradually revealed by frontages drawing aside like theatre curtains, apparent in the concept of the axis, might have derived from the fact that at least one of its authors, namely Roman Feliński, was fascinated by masterpieces of French classical planning. It was him who, as early as in 1910, wrote in his book *Budowa miast* (Building of Cities), about the outstanding achievements of urban planning in Paris; he admired an unrivalled example of a perfect layout of the centre of Nancy, "where Polish king Stanisław Leszczyński created a genuine heartland of palace buildings linked by squares of extraordinary proportions, parks and streets".⁴ As far as Gdynia is concerned, the designers incorporated Bulwar Nadmorski (Promenade) into the plan of the city centre. It was a wide promenade with green squares, which - running along the shore - was supposed to offer a spectacular, southbound interface between the sea and the city.

As the planned main axis and the Maritime Forum were situated north of Starowiejska Street, a stretch of the old summer resort located south of it was of no particular importance for the layout. 10 Lutego was to be an ordinary city street: it was not meant to turn into Skwer Kościuszki, and the spa park was to be removed.

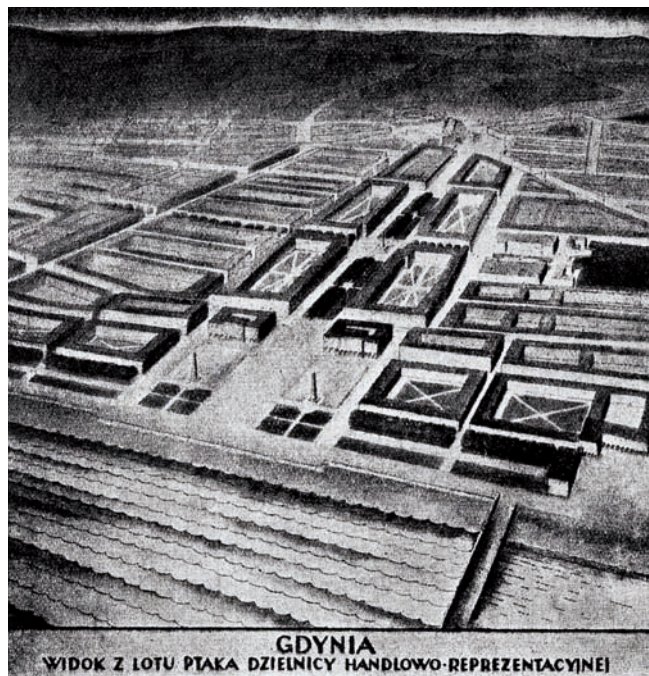
Although very inspiring and interesting from spatial and ideological point of view, the first urban plan of Gdynia (approved in 1926) had to be altered soon, and thus the vision of the "Premiere District" had to change as well.

Skwer Kościuszki and Molo Południowe in 1928-1931 (Kościuszki Square and the South Pier)

Economic changes and the sudden need to build a coal-handling terminal in Gdynia forced changes in the spatial concept of the port. In 1928, the construction of docks started, and they reached much further south than originally planned. This made it necessary to shift the boundaries of port and railway back-up facilities about 250 m south, where originally the central part of the city was planned.

4. Roman Feliński, *Budowa miast*, Lviv 1910, p. 15.

3. The first development plan of Gdynia centre (a fragment of perspective view), made by Adam Kuncewicz under the guidance of Roman Feliński in 1926. "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1926



3. Further information on the plan, as well as on other urban development plans for Gdynia made in the interwar period to be found in the book on Gdynia's architecture and planning: Maria Sołtysik, *Gdynia – miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego. Urbanistyka i architektura*, Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1993.

In this way, what urban planners intended to be a stately district of the city, came to lie at the very edge of city centre, and the large square – the Maritime Forum – no longer had a chance of direct contact with the sea, thus losing its spatial sense. The idea of opening the city to the sea, underlying the whole spatial concept, proved difficult to accomplish, making a re-design of the city centre layout a matter of urgency.

In 1928, a new design was developed; its author, Adam Kuncewicz, moved the main central axis southwards, giving this function to 10 Lutego – the only street to run beyond the enclosed harbour space towards the wooden pier of Żegluga Przybrzeżna (Coastal Shipping Company) that had just been erected. The 151-metre long pier (soon extended to 270 metres) replaced the former spa pier on the axis of the old Gdynia summer resort. The new design, however, provided for a bigger, massive harbour pier (no longer made of timber) to be built at the site of the just-built wooden pier. It was given a shape of an elongated trapezium, widening eastwards, and ending at the Yacht Basin (Fig. 4). The pier was the southernmost pier of the Gdynia port, hence its name Molo Południowe (the South Pier).

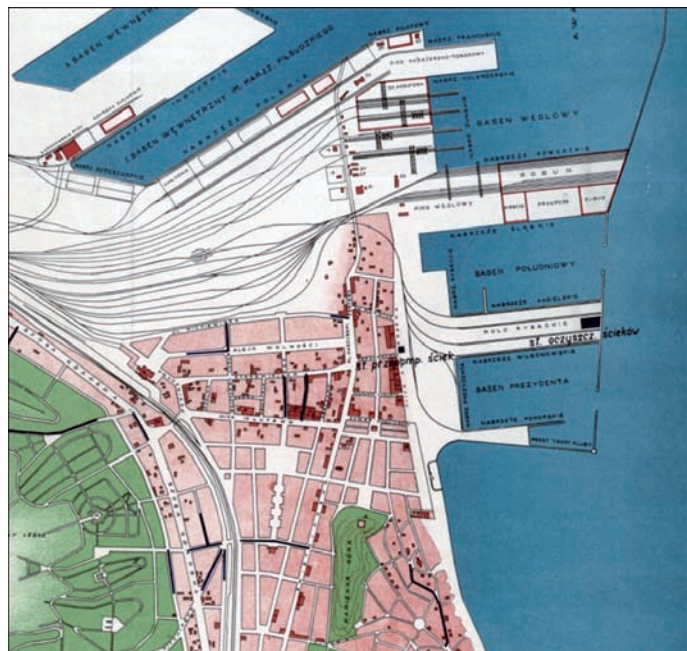
In an effort to adjust the layout of 10 Lutego to its new role, Adam Kuncewicz widened the street to 28 metres. He accentuated its eastern end (right beyond Świętojańska) with a kind of square/boulevard, named Skwer Kościuszki (Kościuszki Square). It was built on the old plot of the Spa Hotel, somewhat referring to its existing layout. Skwer Kościuszki joined the line of the promenade and was, in a way, supposed to echo the Maritime Forum – albeit in an entirely different scale and situation. It was given the form of an elongated thoroughfare of 85 by 310 metres, with a median street/park axis, greens and two parallel streets, supporting the layout in the north and south (Fig. 5a, b). One side of each of the two streets was lined with a row of 5-storey buildings, while the Spa Hotel itself was to be pulled down.

In assessing the spatial quality of the main urban axis layout designed by Adam Kuncewicz, we must point out that its shape was the result of a difficult compromise between the city's needs and the rapid expansion of the port. His solution was not as monumental or elegant as the original 1926 design. Although the larger distance between the building lines along Skwer Kościuszki was to make it into a quasi-square, offering a panorama view of the sea and the South Pier, the problem of connecting it with Molo Południowe was still overlooked and remained spatially unresolved.

The first opportunity to integrate Molo Południowe with the fabric of the city centre emerged when a competition for the Poland's Reunification Memorial was adjudicated in 1930. The monument was to be erected at the end of the pier, at the base of the Yacht Basin, which, obviously, required a clear-cut link with the layout of the main urban axis. One of the most interesting competition entries was the award-winning design by Stanisław Marzyński, inspired by the symbol of "gateway to the world".⁵ The monument, however, was never erected, because of significant changes made in the concept of the pier soon afterwards. Nevertheless, the idea of a monument at the end of the pier survived, although it eventually took the form of an obelisk – and since then, this spatial element has been present in all studies concerning this part of the city. It was supposed to be one of Gdynia's landmarks (Fig. 6).

Spatial shape of the "Premiere District" (1931-1938)

In 1931, the concept of the South Pier changed, and this created an opportunity to re-design the interface between the sea and the city centre in an attractive way. The idea was then conceived for a wide pier, no longer trapezoid shaped, but outlined so as to become an extension of the city's main axis – 10 Lutego and Skwer Kościuszki – to the full width of the latter. It was a unique idea of opening and

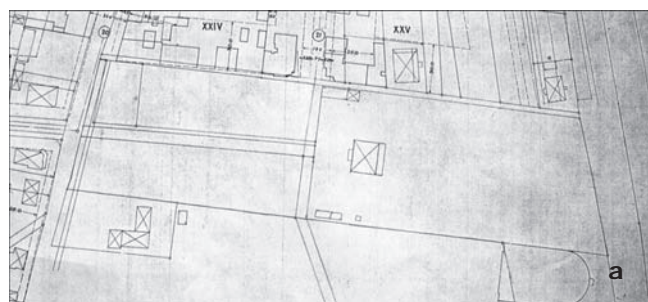


4. Gdynia, blueprint of city and port (fragment) made in 1930, based on the city master plan of 1928-1930. From the collection of State Archive Bydgoszcz

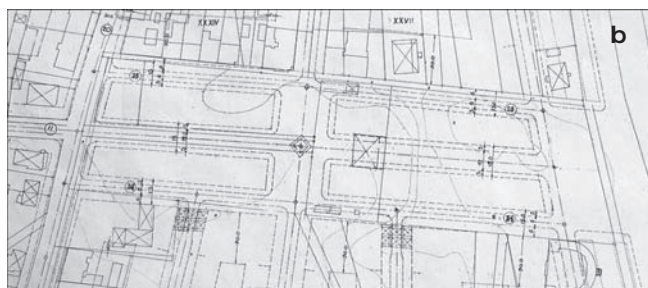
exposing the main part of the city centre to the sea; the idea was fortunate and with vital consequences for the whole city centre, as it came to underlie a new concept of Gdynia's "Premiere District".

The new idea for the South Pier is likely to have resulted from cooperation between port and city planners and designers, particularly between engineer Tadeusz Wenda and architect Jerzy Müller, the head of the unit within the Government Commissioner's Office responsible for city development. In 1931, Tadeusz Wenda presented a design of the South Pier - 120 metres wide and projecting 620 metres into the sea – with the Yacht Basin at its base. Later on, some corrections were made to the very outline of the Yacht Basin, which was enlarged (Fig. 7a, b).

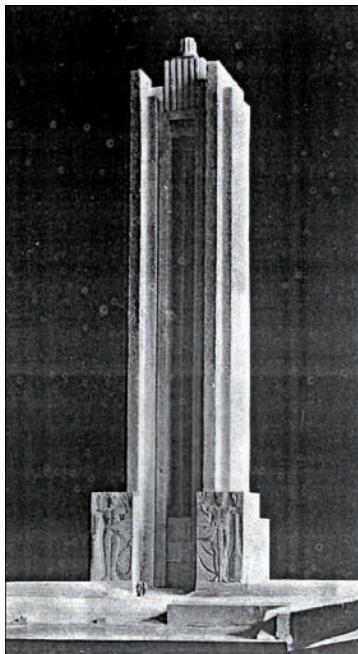
At the same time, planners started to work out how to link the Pier with the city centre in the most attractive way. As early as in 1932, Jerzy Müller presented the first conceptual sketch of the "Premiere District", covering the South Pier and the areas adjacent to the Yacht Basin and the Presidential Basin (Fig. 8). It soon became evident that the sketch was only the beginning of design work on the spatial shape of this prestigious and symbolic site.



5. Skwer Kościuszki and its origin. a. Before the layout of streets and greens was designed in 1927; b. a fragment of the 1927 detailed plan of the centre made by Adam Kuncewicz, with the layout of Skwer Kościuszki. From the collection of State Archive Gdańsk



5. "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1931 No. 4/5.



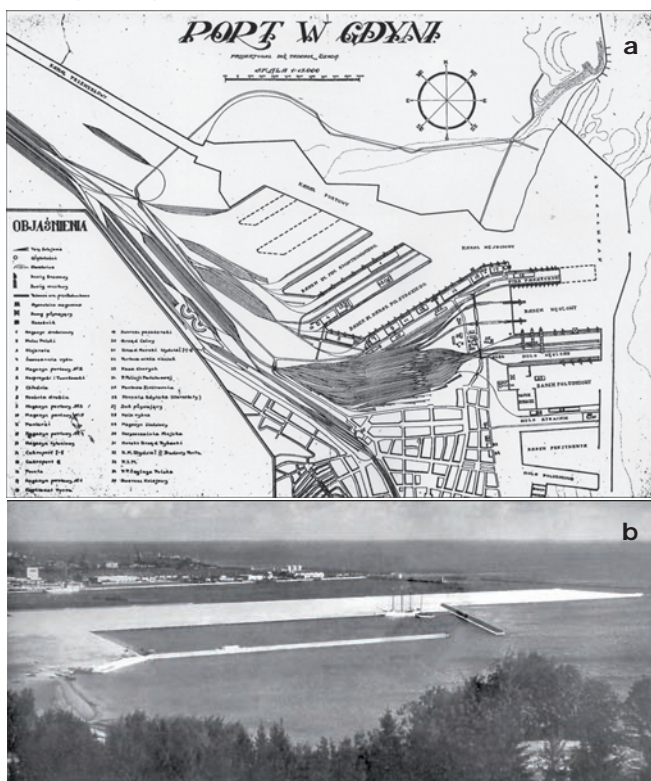
6. Poland's Reunification Memorial: the winning design of the competition, by architect Stanisław Marzyński. "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1930

Intensive work on selecting the concept of the "Premiere District" began when the South Pier was completed in 1936. An urban planning and architectural competition was organised for the development of areas around it and "areas situated at its base, as well as for the design of Marine Sailing Centre at the Yacht Basin".⁶ The winning design was made by Bohdan Damiński and Tadeusz Sieczkowski, their design, however, was approved for completion only in its part concerning the pier itself. The layout of the adjoining areas was referred for further studies to the Design Studio of the Government Commissioner's Office in Gdynia, headed by Stanisław Filipkowski.

The location of Maritime Basilica was the subject of special consideration. Two site options were taken into account: the previously decided at Kamienna Góra and the newly-designed prestigious waterfront square. Various study designs were presented at three conferences: in July 1937, chaired by deputy Prime Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski, with President Ignacy Mościcki participating; in December 1937, chaired by Prof. Tadeusz Tołwiński, with eight expert

6. "Architektura i Budownictwo", 1937, No. 2, pp. 43-58.

7. The layout of the South Pier and the Yacht Basin: a. within the 1931 port design; b. completed in 1936. From the collection of the Gdynia City Museum



town planners participating, and the last one held in April 1938. The results of the proceedings were then accepted by both experts and all the stakeholders.⁷

The final design of the "Premiere District" was ready in June 1938 (Fig. 9). It combined the axial layout of the South Pier (as an extension of 10 Lutego and Skwer Kościuszki) with a new square of the Maritime Forum, planned at the base of the Yacht Basin. A wide avenue was to run along the axis of the Pier, leading to the Poland's Reunification Memorial (newly designed by Waław Tomaszewski in a form of a high obelisk) at its tip.

The Maritime Forum, a spacious square (250 by 110 metres) situated south of the axis, was to be the main composition element of the "Premiere District". It was an elevated square (5 m above sea level), whose longer side descended to the shore and *Basen Żeglarski* (the Yacht Basin) in terraces of spectators' stands. The architectural landmark of the square was the Maritime Basilica, the award-winning design by Bohdan Pniewski of the 1934 architectural competition; it was inspired by the shape of a three-masted ship and included an emblem of maritime Poland, re-unifying Polish territories annexed by the three invaders. The basilica was to close the southern side of the square. Also the northern frontage was to include an architecturally distinct building – a town hall, whose presence in the Maritime Forum was undoubtedly a reference to the famous town hall of Stockholm – a maritime showpiece of the city. The western end of the square was formed by a row of uniform buildings with arcades. On the north of the South Pier, at Presidential Basin, a civic centre was to be built, but its architectural shape had not yet been defined at the time.

It should also be noted that the layout of the "Premiere District" included a square at the foot of Kamienna Góra, namely Plac Grunwaldzki, located here as early as the Gdynia centre development plan of the late 1920s. The square was the spatial ending of the extension of *Żeromskiego* street, widening dynamically towards the foot of Kamienna Góra. In the summer of 1939, Plac Grunwaldzki was the venue of the Maritime Day celebrations.

The whole of the "Premiere District" was designed with great flair, and its asymmetrical layout prevented excessive monumentalism. The composition incorporated elements of functionalism and landscape designing in its modern sense, emphasizing the maritime image of the city and carrying elegance and symbolism.

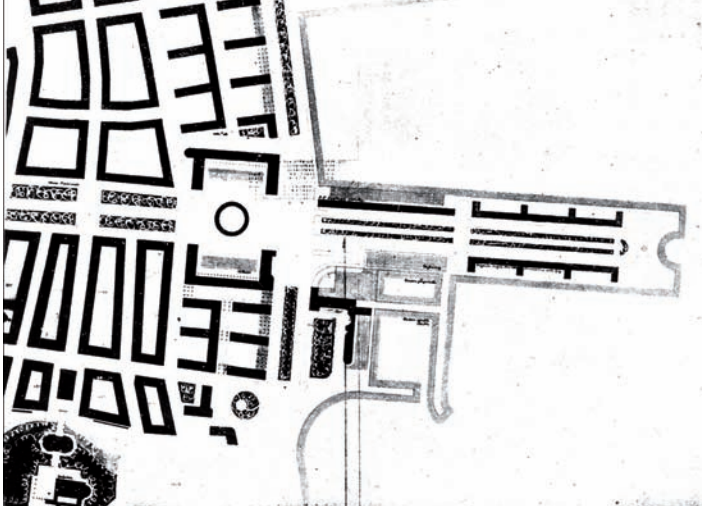
Approved by all the parties involved and well-publicised in the press, the project won considerable public acceptance. Its implementation started very soon, in 1938. By September 1939, the building of the Maritime Station had been erected at the end of the Pier, the construction of Polish Sailor's House was at a well-advanced stage (Fig. 10) and the median greens running of the Pier were partly completed. Today, the site of Molo Południowe together with Basen Żeglarski is Gdynia's most eye-catching sight and tourist attraction – a showpiece of the city.

The praise of monumentalism – the debatable proposal of 1938

The discussion on the spatial shape of the "Premiere District" was carefully watched by Gdynia newspapers and citizens. However, the way Stefan Rudolf – a Warsaw architect, who had only recently come to Gdynia – joined the discussion was quite unparalleled. In 1938, he published a peculiar concept of the district, supplemented with his own commentary.

It was based on Stanisław Filipkowski's design, but it was its intensified and highly monumentalised version, where a mirror image of the square on the other side of the South Pier was added (Fig. 12a, b). What can be seen there is two large, connecting squares surrounded by colonnades, the symmetrically arranged shapes of the Maritime Basilica

7. Stanisław Filipkowski, *Dzielnica reprezentacyjna portowego miasta Gdyni*, "Biuletyn Urbanistyczny", 1938, No. 2, pp. 43-50.



8. The first design of the "Premiere District", probably made by Jerzy Müller in 1932. "Biuletyn Urbanistyczny" 1938

and the Town Hall, with column-like torches further on, and two connected towers forming a triumphal arch at the junction of 10 Lutego and Świętojańska streets – all this in a strict discipline of symmetry and monumentalism, so typical of the late 1930s. This was also the spirit of his comments on the design: "Gdynia's 'Premiere District' should form a grand and monumental urban development [...]. The heart of the development is to be a large square, arranged symmetrically on the axis running the length of the South Pier [...]"⁸. He also added that a space like this could never be too large, and was really necessary for all sorts of public gatherings, demonstrations and parades.

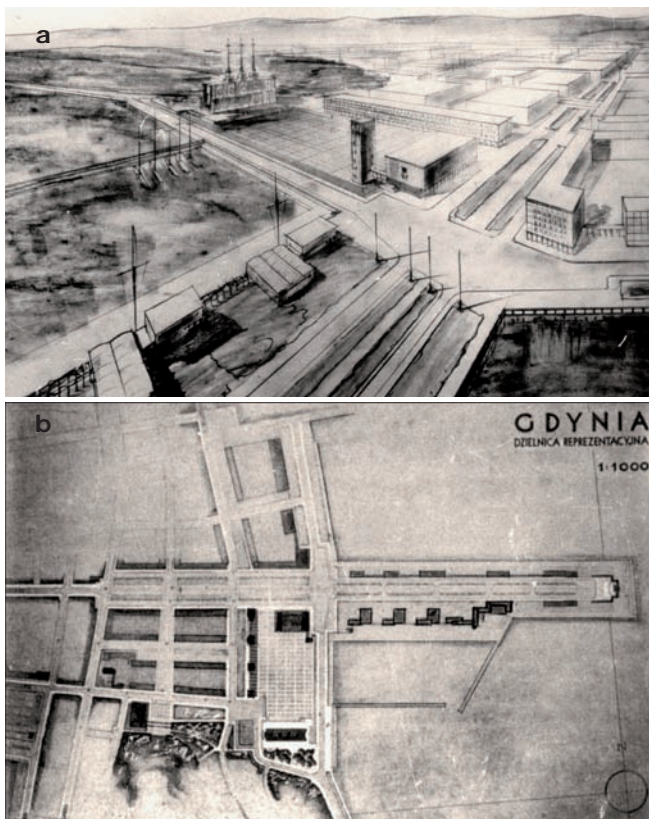
Stefan Rudolf's idea of re-designing the layout was soaked with only too evident fondness for totalitarian aesthetics. It was hardly met with enthusiasm in Gdynia; neither did it affect the approved spatial concept of the district.

World War II years

During the war, the centre of Gdynia suffered no major war damage, which, however, was the plight of the port, the quays of the South Pier and the Yacht basin included. In the early 1940s, during the German occupation, two spatial elements appeared in the area of the "Premiere District",

8. Stefan Rudolf, *Forum Morskie*, 1938.

9. The design of the "Premiere District" made by Stanisław Filipkowski in June 1932 – the concept accepted for execution: a. perspective view; b. plan. From author's own collection



not planned before the war.

One of these elements was a poplar alley, planted by the Germans. Since then, the trees have obstructed the view of the Yacht Basin from the city centre. The other one was a *Stadthalle* (non-existent today), a big arena with a nightclub, built in 1942 at the foot of Kamienna Góra. Located at the junction of Sienkiewicza, Armii Krajowej and Sędzickiego streets, it was nicknamed "the barn", due to its dull architecture and a high gable roof. After the war, it housed various theatres⁹ until 1960, when, after a major renovation, it burnt down completely.

Attempts to continue the idea and the 1956 architectural competition

The late 1940s were the years of post-war reconstruction, for both Gdynia and the whole country. The basins adjoining the South Pier were restored to their original shape, the construction of the Polish Sailor's House, disrupted by the war, was resumed. The building, however, was no longer intended for its original function: it was to house the state-run Sea Fisheries School (now the Faculty of Navigation of Gdynia Maritime University).

At the same time, town planners (among them, some working in Gdynia before the war) started making designs to complete the project of an elegant waterfront. To a greater or lesser extent, their plans were a continuation of the pre-war concepts, with some differences, however, in spatial landmark distribution. For post-war planners, areas north of the South Pier, at *Nabrzeże Prezydenta* (Presidential Quay), were as important as those south of the Pier, at the Yacht Basin.

In 1947, the first post-war design was completed. It was made by Kamil Lisowski, Leszek Dąbrowski and Czesław Kaszycki from G-D Plan Studio, and – in planning terms – was a clear reference to the 1938 design of Stanisław Filipkowski. The Maritime Forum, widely open to the Yacht Basin, remained the main square. The 1947 concept was the last to include the idea of the Maritime Basilica, in the form given to it by Bohdan Pniewski. The high-rise counterpart of the Basilica at the other end of the Forum, however, was no longer the Town Hall, but a hotel. There were also some other adjustments. On its western side, the square was closed by museum buildings, and the previously planned civic centre – now three elongated blocks perpendicular to the Presidential Quay – was placed on the northern side of Aleja Zjednoczenia (now Jana Pawła II avenue). A maritime community centre was to be erected beside them. The design by Lisowski and his colleagues from G-D Studio also provided for the southern extension of Żeromskiego Street; however, it was no longer a wide axis (as in Filipkowski's design) but a pedestrian precinct leading to the foot of Kamienna Góra and ending with a semicircular pavilion. The planners may have thought about a bandshell there, which was actually built when Plac Grunwaldzki was refurbished some time later (Fig. 14).

In 1949, the decision was made to erect a Red Army Memorial on the axis of the South Pier, where the Spa Hotel used to be. The creation of the monument was commissioned to an eminent sculptor, Marian Wnuk, and the unveiling ceremony took place in 1953. Despite its clear political propaganda message, the monument was an artistic masterpiece, and its scale and form integrated well with the whole layout of Skwer Kościuszki and Aleja Zjednoczenia. It was the landmark of this part of the city for years, until it was dismantled in 1990.

Throughout the 1950s, the area around the former "Premiere District" was the subject of study work by planners from various Tricity design studios. In 1956, an urban planning competition was organised for the development of the space now called "Maritime Forum" in Gdynia. The results of the competition were to provide material for further project implementation efforts. We know of them because they were

9. *Musical, operetki, wodewile*, S. Kitowski (ed.), Gdynia 2008, p. 7.

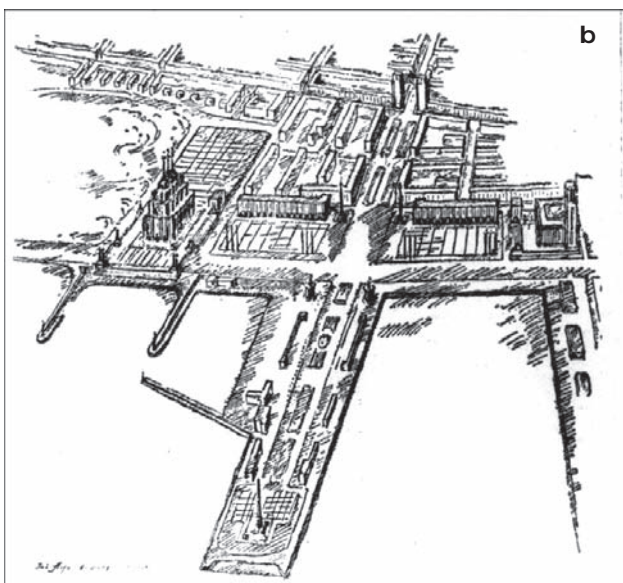


10. Polish Sailor's House, now the Navigation Faculty of Gdynia Maritime University, built in 1938-1940; designed by Bohdan Damiński and Tadeusz Sieczkowski. Photo by Maria J. Sołtysik

included in the summary, in a unified graphic form, made in 1958 by two architects: Włodzimierz Prochaska and Eugeniusz Maciejewski. As they both did design work in Gdynia before the war, they were familiar with the essentials of the problem.

The Maritime Forum was to be created at the site of the former "Premiere District", covering the areas on both sides of the South Pier and extending west up to Świętojańska Street. This time, the development plan was much more elaborate, though clearly different, adjusted to the new political situation. First of all, the Maritime Basilica and the Town Hall were out of the question; these two symbols of spiritual power and self-government could not take shape in the new political realities. Instead, the plan provided sites for a maritime community centre, a library, a museum, an officers' house, and administrative and hotel buildings. A coastal shipping passenger terminal and a water sports centre were to be built on the South Pier. While analysing designs made at that time, we cannot fail to notice two of them, based on completely different ideological and spatial development approaches.

12. The concept of the "Premiere District" accepted for execution, architect Stefan Rudolf; **a.** a view from the sea; **b.** a bird's eye view

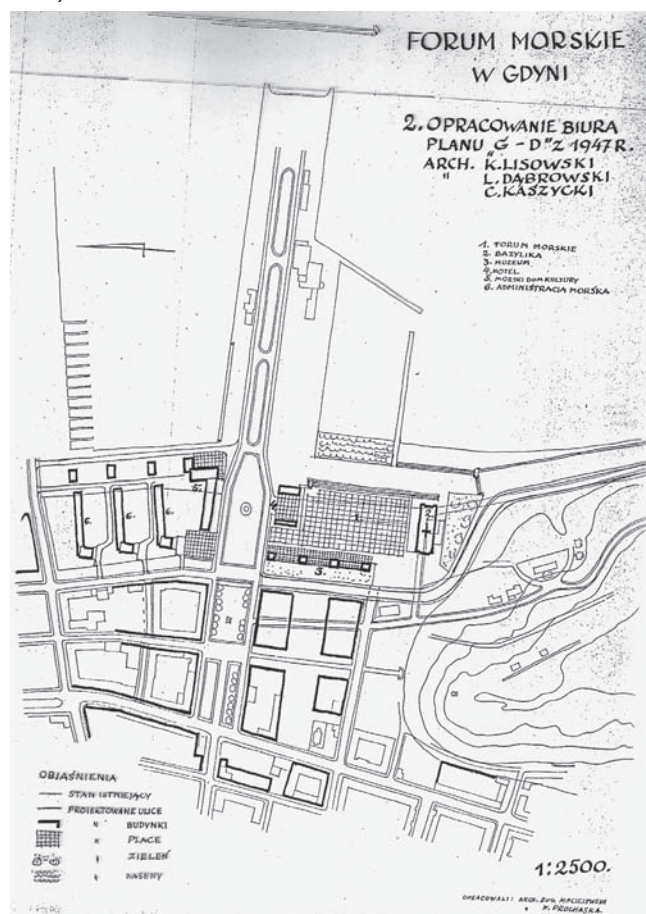


11. Yacht Basin and the South Pier with the former Polish Sailor's House, a view from Kamienna Góra. Photo by Maria J. Sołtysik

One of them was a spatial concept made by a team from the Gdańsk-based design studio of marine construction headed by Lech Zaleski (Fig. 15). To a certain extent, it was a continuation of the pre-World War II designs for this space, although a number of changes were introduced, too. First of all, it provided for a considerable enlargement of the Yacht Basin and the creation of an additional inland-going basin. In this way, the architects made the main square smaller, shifting it to the west, where it connected with Plac Grunwaldzki, and continuing it as far as the Holy Virgin Church. From the west, the waterfront square was closed by a large shape of a hotel and a library behind it. In place of the formerly-planned basilica, a holiday resort of the Workers' Holiday Fund was to be built; north of the South Pier, on *Presidential Basin*, a maritime administration complex, a seaman's house and three tourist hotels were planned. On the Pier itself, a coastal shipping passenger terminal was located at *Pomorskie* quay, while a maritime museum and a row of boat sheds flanked the former Sailor's House. A wide promenade was planned along *Pomorskie* and *Prezydencki* quays.

The design made by Józef Chmiel and Tadeusz Różański of Miastoprojekt-Gdańsk was something completely different (Fig. 16). Their work had nothing to do with the interwar concepts, which can be seen in the total absence of

13. The first post-war concept of the continuation of "Premiere District" development, made in 1947 by planners from G-D Studio: Kamil Lisowski, L(Leszek?) Dąbrowski and Czesław Kaszycki. From author's own collection





14. Bandshell in Plac Grunwaldzki at the foot of Kamienna Góra, built in the 1950s. Photo by Maria J. Sołtysik

a waterfront square next to the Yacht Basin. The space was to be filled with a large museum building and an unspecified services complex. Instead, a small square-like opening was proposed north of the South Pier, with an officer's house and two twin service buildings. In the central part of the whole space, a community centre and a theatre were to be erected, and a large library was to be situated south of it, on the slope of Kamienna Góra. Its treeless north-eastern slope was earmarked for a number of scenic outlooks, while on the hilltop, a coffeehouse would be situated.

In fact, none of the competition designs was accepted for execution in its entirety, although some of the structures built within the next thirty years were located where Lech Zaleski and his team suggested in their design.

Hurried projects of 1960-1990

Throughout the three decades between 1960 and 1990, the former "Premiere District" was an area where ad hoc decisions were made concerning large-volume buildings. The space was not treated as a whole, as a defined urban layout, but as individual fragments, according to current needs and possibilities, with a notable exception of structures located within the very South Pier, which followed the interwar spatial development concept.

The first buildings to be erected were Gdynia Aquarium (1967-70, Fig. 17) at the end of the South Pier, followed by the nearby Coastal Shipping Passenger Terminal soon afterwards (1973-75, Fig. 18). Both buildings were designed by architect Lech Zaleski, who participated in the competition for Maritime Forum in the 1950s. They both represent interesting architecture, fitting well in scale and character in the coastal landscape. At the same time, a number of boat sheds were built along the line of the Yacht basin - low and well integrated with their surroundings.

Another two prestigious buildings erected within the area of the former "Premiere District" were located at the foot of Kamienna Góra. They were the Musical Theatre (1971-79, Fig. 19)¹⁰ and the Gdynia Hotel next to it. In spite of the fact that they are neighbouring buildings, they are strongly discordant. An interesting, articulated shape of the theatre (designed by Józef Chmiel and Daniel Ołędzki) was dwarfed by a huge cuboid of the hotel, whose off-the-shelf design was bought from a Swedish hotel company in the 1980s. The hotel has been the ugliest building in Gdynia for years, and is still an insult to the scale and form appropriate for such a prestigious space.

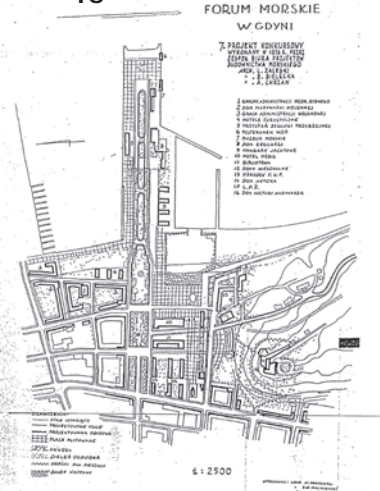
The period of 1990-1996.

Great visions, small projects

The political breakthrough of 1989 in Poland marked a turning point in the attitude towards city space. Its first manifestation was the removal of the Red Army Memorial from Skwer Kościuszki. A search of identity, a return to tradition and roots – something of a "no-entry zone" for years – became and increasingly common and no longer concealed practice. A search for long-lost spatial values in Gdynia was resumed, and the area of the South Pier was again seen as the city's potential showpiece. However, not all the concepts proved fortunate.

In the 1990s, two concepts for the area in question were made almost simultaneously: the idea of locating the World Trade Center office building on the axis of Skwer Kościuszki (in the form of a huge triumphal arch) and the idea of mooring the *Dar Pomorza* tall ship at the end of the South Pier. The former – although intriguing as a concept – would deprive the space of its unique landscape value, dwarfing it by the large scale and "administrative" nature of the building. The concept of placing *Dar Pomorza* on the

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16. The 1956 design for the Gdynia's Maritime Forum competition made by architects Józef Chmiel and Tadeusz Różański (from author's own collection).

15. The 1956 design for the Gdynia's Maritime Forum competition made by architects from Gdańsk-based design studio of marine construction: Lech Zaleski, Barbara Bielecka and Andrzej Chrzan. From author's own collection



10. 1947-1997, 50 lat dorobku architektów Wybrzeża Gdańskiego (eds. J. Ciemnołoński, K. Pławiński, J. Poklewski-Koziełło), Gdańsk 2000.

17. Gdynia Aquarium in the South Pier, eastern part, erected in 1967-1970, designed by Lech Zaleski. Photo by Maria J. Sołtysik





18. Coastal Shipping Passenger Terminal in the South Pier, Gdynia, built in 1973-1975, designed by Lech Zaleski. Photo by Maria J. Soltysik



19. Gdynia Musical Theatre, built in 1971-1979, designed by Józef Chmiel and Daniel Olędzki. Photo by Maria J. Soltysik

dry dock at the end of the South Pier (where the Poland's Reunification Memorial was once meant to be erected) was much more in harmony with the character and historical tradition of the site. However, this concept had also many adverse effects, e.g. the necessity to locate an additional building there, or making the beautiful sailing ship a kind of dummy standing in a hole in the ground.

Certainly, the most appropriate idea for this space was to put a prominent and symbolic sculpture on the South Pier axis. In 2006, a competition for the Monument to the Polish Seaman (a second one, actually) was organised; the monument was to be located where the Red Army Memorial used to stand. This time, the results of the competition were quite promising, both as a sculpture and as a spatial element. The winning design – made by Tadeusz Pietrkiewicz, Wojciech Sęczawa and Tomasz Celewicz – was a sculpture

20. The winning design in the 2006 competition for the Monument to the Polish Seaman, by Gdańsk artists Tadeusz Pietrkiewicz, Wojciech Sęczawa and Tomasz Celewicz



21. Gdynia City Museum, built in 2007, designed by Krzysztof Kozłowski. Photo by Maria J. Soltysik

representing a symbolic “gate” (Fig. 20), an inherent part of the city's history. Unfortunately, the design has never been executed.

Epilogue – but is it really a happy ending?

In 2007, public attention focused on the former site of the “Premiere District” again. A prestigious project was being completed: the construction of a building to house the Gdynia City Museum and the Naval Museum. The building, designed by Gdynia architect Krzysztof Kozłowski, was erected next to the former Polska Riwiera hotel (Fig. 21).

The same year, Gdynia authorities organised an urban planning and architectural competition for a cultural centre which was to be located in the former “Premiere District”, or more precisely, in its very centre, i.e. within the former waterfront square. The spatial programme for the complex envisaged public buildings like a theatre, a multimedia library and an art gallery, and the designers' task was to form a square with a view of the sea. This requirement was stressed in the terms of the competition. The winning design (Fig. 22) was made by Stanisław Fiszer, an architect working in Paris and Warsaw. However, even a first glance at his design shows that the main requirement was not satisfied, because the square in front of the cultural centre buildings is separated from the sea by a poplar alley and some random, substandard elements of the existing development. The main value of the site – the view of the sea – has been lost. Let us hope that this mistake will be rectified in subsequent design work. Let us also hope that we will live to see the idea of a central square open to the sea materialise, the idea which has always been the keynote of Gdynia urban planning.

22. The winning design in the 2007 competition for the Cultural Centre, by Stanisław Fiszer and his team. Photo by Maria J. Soltysik

