



THE BURDEN OF EXCESS: ISSUES IN UNIFIED MANAGEMENT POLICY FOR GDAŃSK'S FIVE HISTORIC MONUMENTS

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ABSTRACT: Historical monuments constitute a prestigious distinction for sites of particular significance to cultural heritage. There are five such sites in Gdańsk, whose management – despite their formal status – still faces various challenges arising from fragmented ownership structures, incomplete local development plans, and a lack of legal instruments and common municipal policy. The example of Gdańsk demonstrates that recognition as a historical monument does not automatically guarantee effective heritage protection. Effective protection requires the coordination of all owners' actions, which would lead to the establishment of a unified management policy for historical monuments at the local level, ensuring the durability and coherence of the city's cultural heritage.

KEY WORDS: Monuments of History, cultural heritage, heritage protection, cultural heritage management, Gdańsk

Introduction

Sites designated as historic monuments, a status reserved for properties of particular importance to Poland's cultural heritage, integrate various dimensions of historical, educational, and symbolic value. While the primary objective of conservation is to ensure the durability, integrity, and authenticity of historic landscape, historic monuments are also intended to guard and integrate those values that testify to their uniqueness.

The Act of 23 July 2003 on the Protection and Care of Monuments (Ustawa z dnia 23 lipca 2003 r. o ochronie zabytków i opiece nad zabytkami) established historic monuments as one of the five legal forms of heritage protection in Poland. They are designated by a regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland, upon request of the minister responsible for culture and national heritage¹. This recognition makes them the most prestigious category of protection, alongside – though currently outside the statutory framework – the recognition as UNESCO World Heritage Sites². The category of historic monument was first introduced into the Polish legal system by the Act of 15 February 1962 on the Protection of Monuments and Museums (Ustawa z dnia 15 lutego 1962 r. o ochronie dóbr kultury)³, but its practical application came 32 years later, in 1994, when President Lech Wałęsa granted the status of historic monument to 15 heritage sites, including, among others, Gdańsk within the scope of its 17th-century fortifications⁴.

The list of historic monuments in Poland includes 133 sites (August 2025), with urban and architectural complexes, sites of national remembrance, cultural landscapes, as well as industrial and religious heritage⁵. Few Polish cities can boast such a concentration of historic monuments as Gdańsk. Until today, this status has been granted to five of Gdańsk's historic complexes of highly diverse character: the city within the scope of its 17th-century fortifications, the Gdańsk Shipyard, the Wisłoujście Fortress, the Westerplatte battlefield, and the former Cistercian–cathedral complex in Oliwa (for comparison, Kraków and Warsaw have four historic monuments) (Fig. 2).

¹ Ustawa z dnia 23 lipca 2003 r. o ochronie zabytków i opiece nad zabytkami, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20031621568/O/D20031568.pdf> accessed 10.07.2025.

² Szmygin, B. (2016). *Światowe Dziedzictwo kultury UNESCO – charakterystyka, metodologia, zarządzanie*. Polski Komitet Narodowy ICOMOS, Lublin University of Technology, 251-258

³ Between 1962 and 1972, there was an attempt to introduce a five-tier classification of monuments, with class “0” intended to be reserved for monuments of the highest value. [Lewicki, J. (2016). O początkach klasyfikacji zabytków. O wadach i zaletach polskich systemów wartościowania zabytków. *Ochrona Dziedzictwa Kulturowego*, 2, 95–100].

⁴ Dobosz, P. (1997). Prawne aspekty ochrony funkcji zabytków nieruchomych. *Ochrona Zabytków*, 50(1), 1–11.

⁵ A significant expansion of the list occurred in 2017–2018 in connection with the centennial of Poland's regaining of independence (Fig. 1)

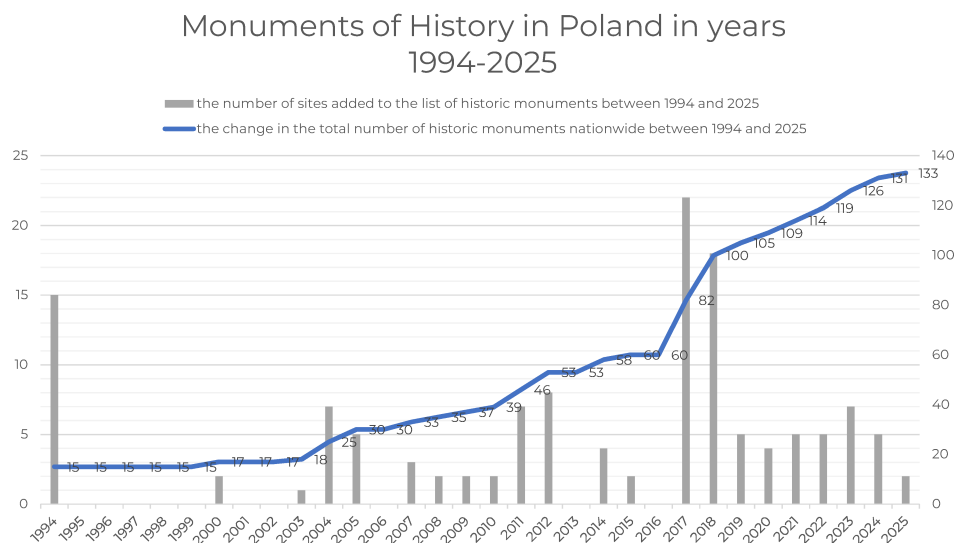


Fig. 1. Comparison of the number of designations as historic monuments in individual years: the number of sites added on the list of historic monuments between 1994 and 2025 and the change in the total number of historic monuments nationwide between 1994 and 2025

Tab. 1. Historic monuments in Gdańsk: chronology and ownership structure. Based on: <https://zabytek.pl/pl/mapa?sekcja=pomniki-historii> i <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

	Historic Monument	Character	Year of entry	Ownership structure	Responsible Entity
1.	Gdańsk within its 17th-century fortifications	Urban layout	1994	State Treasury, private owners, religious associations, municipality and inter-municipal unions, counties and county unions, voivodeship	City of Gdańsk
2.	Westerplatte Battlefield	Battlefield	2003	State Treasury, municipalities and inter-municipal unions	(a cultural park is planned within boundaries slightly broader than the Main Town)
3.	Cistercian-Cathedral complex in Oliwa	Religious and sepulchral complex	2017	State Treasury, private owners, religious associations, municipality and inter-municipal unions, voivodeship	Museum of the Second World War (partially)
4..	The Gdańsk Shipyard - the birthplace of Solidarity Movement	Industrial heritage site	2018	State Treasury, municipalities and inter-municipal unions	Archdiocesan Curia of Gdańsk, National Museum, City of Gdańsk (Gdański Zarząd Dróg i Zieleni)

5.	Wisłoujście Fortress	Military architecture	2018	State Treasury, sole-shareholder companies of the State Treasury, municipalities and inter-municipal unions	Museum of Gdańsk + 2 private owners
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The management of historic monuments in Gdańsk faces significant challenges arising from the fragmentation of ownership structures, the ambiguity of competences, and the regulatory framework governing their management and protection⁶. Despite its formal distinction, designation as a historic monument does not entail any additional material benefits or stricter requirements concerning methods of conservation. These aspects are regulated through other forms of protection that already apply to properties recognised as historic monuments (e.g., mandatory entry in the national rejestry of historic monuments, or the determination of protection rules within local spatial development plans)⁷.

In order to fully illustrate the scale of challenges related to the management of historic monuments, it is worth analysing each of them individually.

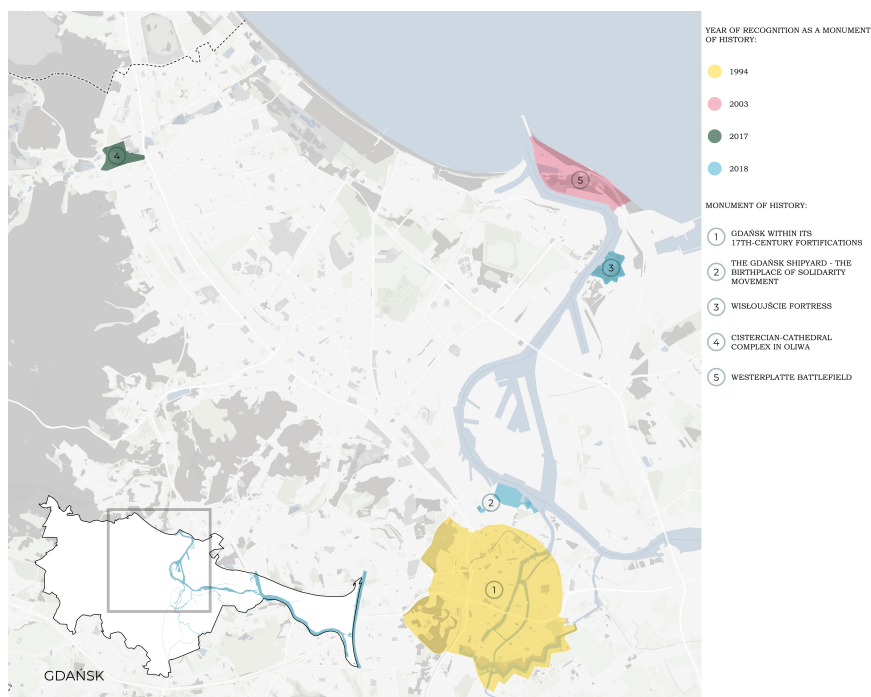


Fig. 2. Historic monuments in Gdańsk with the chronology of their recognition as historic monuments. Own elaboration based on: <https://zabytek.pl/pl/mapa?sekcja=pomniki-historii> (13.07.2025). Map source: <https://www.mapbox.com>

⁶ Dąbrowski, J. (2019). Pomniki historii - spojrzenie krytyczne. *Ochrona Dziedzictwa Kulturowego*, (7), 41–50. <https://doi.org/10.35784/odk.5>

⁷ Kowalski, W., Zalaszińska, K. (2011). Prawo ochrony dziedzictwa kulturowego w Polsce - próba oceny i wnioski, In: B. Szmygin (2011) *Systemy ochrony zabytków w Polsce – analiza, diagnoza, propozycje*, Polski Komitet Narodowy ICOMOS, Lublin University of Technology, 20.

Gdańsk within its 17th-century fortifications

The first site in Gdańsk to be designated as a historic monument was the city within its 17th-century fortifications⁸. Recognised as monument of history on 8th September 1994 and largely overlaps with the area recognized as a monument on 11 February 1947 by decision of the Voivodeship Monument Conservator in Gdańsk⁹. The historic monument encompasses the most important parts of the city's historic landscape – including Głównie Miasto (German: Rechtstadt), Stare Miasto (German: Altstadt), Dolne Miasto (German: Niederstadt), Stare Przedmieście (German: Vorstadt), Zamczystko (German: Alteschloss), Osiek (German: Hakelwerk), Wyspa Spichrzów (German: Speicherinsel), Ołowianka Island (German: Bleihof) and Długie Ogrody (German: Langgarten) – whose historic buildings were reconstructed after II World War damage¹⁰. However, there are areas of the monument that extend beyond the boundaries of the 1947 registry entry (Fig. 3), which conflicts with the assumption that a historic monument can only encompass a property recognized as an immovable monument or a cultural park. These inconsistencies, however, result from the absence of a graphic annex to the 1947 Act – the map accompanying the Presidential regulation was prepared only in 1994 by Janusz Tarnacki. This map changed the 1947 sentry by extending it to include the Biskupia Górka area while excluding the Elbląska Street and Aleja Zwycięstwa areas¹¹.

⁸ Zarządzenie Prezydenta RP z dnia 8 września 1994 w sprawie uznania za pomnik historii, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP19940500415/O/M19940415.pdf>, accessed 10.07.2025.

⁹ Kostarczyk, A. (1998). Gdańsk, pomnik historii. Jakie wartości i jaka dobra kontynuacja?, Gdańsk. Pomnik historii, In: A. Kostarczyk, *Gdańsk, pomnik historii. Teksta gdańska*, 3, Regionalny Ośrodek Studiów i Ochrony Środowiska Kulturowego w Gdańsku, Gdańsk, 7-8.

¹⁰ Majewski, J. S. (2023). *Gdańsk – miasto w zasięgu obwarowań z XVII wieku*, <https://spotkaniazabytkami.pl/gdansk-zabytkowa-czesc-miasta-w-obrebie-xvii-wiecznych-fortyfikacji>, accessed 25.07.2025.

¹¹ The entry for Aleja Zwycięstwa was effectively duplicated by a separate registry entry for the avenue under Decision No. 285 (24 February 1967), because the earlier area-based entry did not directly protect the rows of lime trees.

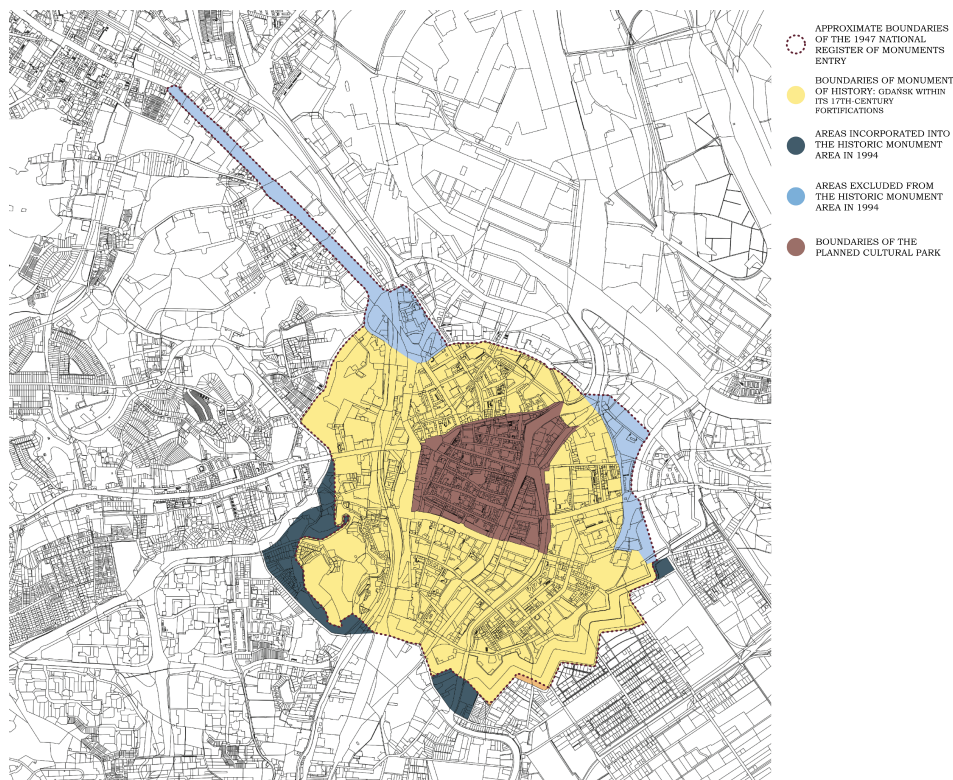


Fig. 3. Areas of the 11 February 1947 monument registry entry and the historic monument, as well as the planned cultural park covering part of the Main Town. Own elaboration based on: Kostarczyk, A. (1998) *Gdańsk, pomnik historii. Jakie wartości i jaka dobra kontynuacja?*, Gdańsk. *Pomnik historii*, in Kostarczyk, A., *Gdańsk, pomnik historii. Teksta gdańska 3* (1998), Regionalny Ośrodek Studiów i Ochrony Środowiska Kulturowego w Gdańsku, Gdańsk, 7-8, <https://zabytek.pl/pl/mapa?sekcja=pomniki-historii> (13.07.2025). Map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

Another current issue concerning the protection of the historic monument area is the lack of full coverage of this area by the local spatial development plans (Fig. 4)¹². This issue is particularly visible in the Old Town area, especially around the train station and Heweliusza Street, where high-rise buildings have been erected over the past 50 years. These structures visually dominate against the much lower Main City buildings, whose skyline was shaped for centuries primarily by church towers, the town hall, and defensive towers (Fig. 5). The new dominant structures have been built on areas that are currently not covered by planning regulations, which theoretically allows for a high degree of discretion in redevelopment processes. In practice, however, heritage conservation authorities often delay or refuse to legalize construction projects with similar parameters. An exception is the issuance of land development decision, which – as in the case

¹² Biuro Rozwoju Gdańska, *Miejscowe Plany Zagospodarowania Przestrzennego*, <https://www.brg.gda.pl/planowanie-przestrzenne/miejscowe-plany>, accessed 23.07.2025.

of the plot on Wodopój Street¹³ – were agreed upon under the principle of “tacit approval”. Such arrangements later cause conflicts during project approvals.

Therefore, the local spatial development plan, which constitutes the primary instrument of municipal spatial policy, defines, among other things, detailed rules for conservation protection and the ways in which individual plots can be used.

In highly attractive areas for tourism and investment, the absence of local-level regulations leads to numerous complications. Vague regulations generate conflicts concerning how and to what extent development projects can be carried out, and parts of the historic urban landscape – where investment pressure is highest – are exposed to ad hoc construction decisions resulting from the lack of a coherent protection framework imposed by the local plan.

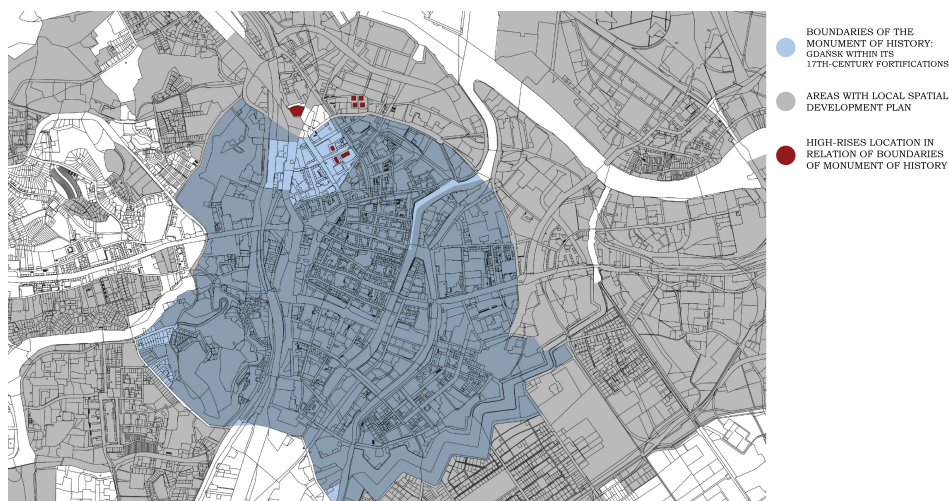


Fig. 4. Coverage of the Old Town with local spatial development plans. High-rise buildings disrupting the visual exposure of the historic city center are marked in red. Own elaboration based on: <https://www.brg.gda.pl/planowanie-przestrzenne/miejscowe-plany> (13.07.2025) Map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

¹³ Karendys, E. (2025). *Nie będzie kontrowersyjnego projektu na Starym Mieście w Gdańsku. Nowa koncepcja Moderny*, https://www.architekturaibiznes.pl/nie-bedzie-kontrowersyjnego-projekt-na-starym-miescie-w-gdansk.-za-nowa-koncepcje-odpowiada-rayss-group,40342.html?srsId=AfmBOoquifggreqASCmQRaIJxXYR_Mo2y-uljIFMGN0jPmFr3SXh1Y, accessed 20.09.2025.

It becomes evident that conflicts may arise not only from the absence of local spatial development plans. A notable example is the northern tip of Wyspa Spichrzów, where the local plan adopted in 2008 was modified in such a way that allowed the change of roof geometry¹⁴, and construction of buildings exceeding the scale of the historic structures in the Main Town¹⁵.



Fig. 5. Gdańsk visible from Grodzisko illustrates the scale of high-rise buildings in the area of the Main Railway Station against the surrounding built environment. Photo: B. Mączkowska

¹⁴ Particular attention should be paid to Uchwała Nr LIII/1507/10 Rady Miasta Gdańska z 2010 roku, dotycząca miejscowego planu zagospodarowania przestrzennego dla Wyspy Spichrzów w rejonie ulic Stągiewnej i Chmielnej (Resolution No. LIII/1507/10 of the Gdańsk City Council from 2010, concerning the local spatial development plan for Wyspa Spichrzów in the area of Stągiewna and Chmielna Streets). For the area 001-M/U31 (local plan entry no. 1146), point 7c allows for a deviation from the standard roof pitch (specified in the range of 45°–60°) if justified by the historical context.

¹⁵ According to the local spatial development plan (entry no. 1146), the permissible building height was set in the range of 23 to 33 m above sea level (point 8i). Buildings constructed on Wyspa Spichrzów reach a maximum roof height of 33 m, which corresponds to the height of the tallest of the originally existing granaries on the island – Gloria Dei. For comparison, typical buildings in the Main Town reach up to 23 m above sea level, meaning that the new structures clearly exceed the scale of the historic urban landscape. As a result, the spatial scale is disrupted, and the buildings on Wyspa Spichrzów rise above the roofs of the historic structures by approximately one story.

The desire to construct high-rise buildings in city centers is caused by the perception that such structures symbolize prestige, modernity, and the dynamism of economic development. Skyscrapers are associated with technological progress and innovative architecture, and they often become a city's hallmark, reflecting its competitiveness and openness to global trends. Frequently, investors aim to maximize profits from their developments, to which cities often respond favorably¹⁶. These trends pose significant challenges for cities with rich cultural heritage. In Gdańsk, the absence of consistent protection of the city's silhouette results from the adoption of fragmented local plans – until today, more than 120 local spatial development plans have been enacted within the area of the historic monument of Gdańsk within its 17th-century fortifications. This historic monument area is characterized by an exceptionally fragmented ownership structure (Fig. 6), with properties belonging to private owners, cooperatives, the municipality, and the State Treasury coexisting on the same territory. This situation complicates the implementation of a coherent policy aimed at protecting these areas, as each entity has slightly different priorities, reinforcing pressure to develop small-scale local plans that are derived out of a larger whole. Activities carried out in areas lacking a single managing authority, where the interests of various stakeholders differ significantly, can compromise the integrity of the historic urban layout. For this reason, the city has once again initiated the establishment of a cultural park limited to the Main Town and the northern part of Wyspa Spichrzów.



Fig. 6. Property ownership of a fragment of the Main Town area. Author's own elaboration based on: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>. Map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

¹⁶ Samól, P. (2012) Nienasycenie w architekturze – pragmatyczne i ideologiczne przyczyny wznoszenia drapaczy chmur na przykładzie Gdańska, In: M. Kraska, A. Gumowska, J. Wróbel (2012). *Między nieobecnością a Nadmiarem. O Niedopowiedzeniu I Nienasyceniu We współczesnej Kulturze*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 239-247.

Westerplatte Battlefield

In the northern part of Gdańsk, at the mouth of the Vistula River, lies the Westerplatte Peninsula. In the public consciousness, it is regarded as the site of the first battle that marked the beginning of World War II, serving as an important witness to history and a symbol of courage and Polish resistance¹⁷. As one of the most important sites of national remembrance, it was recognised as a historic monument on 22nd August 2003¹⁸.

The peninsula is currently owned by four entities: the Port Authority, the Military, the City of Gdańsk, and the Museum of the Second World War (Fig. 7).

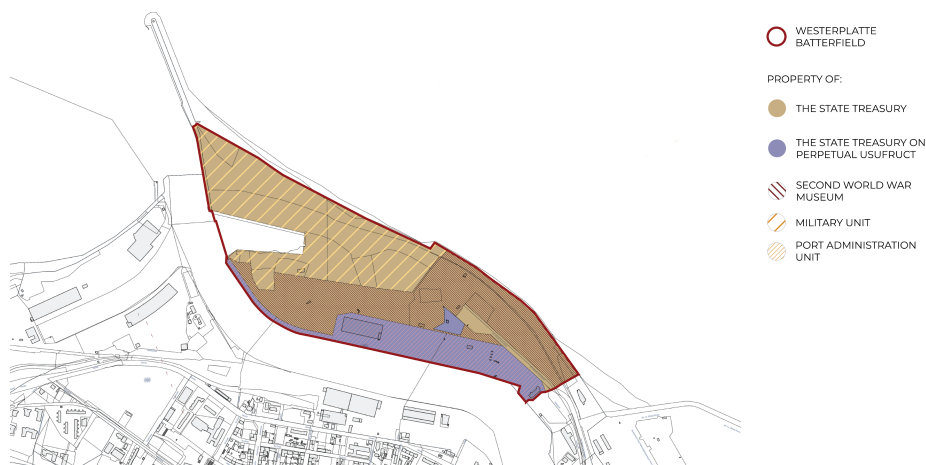


Fig. 7. Property ownership of the Westerplatte Peninsula. Author's own elaboration based on: <https://geogdansk.pl/app/pl/?lang=pl%20&page=Strona-glowna>. Map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

The transfer of this area to the Port Authority and the military led to the peninsula remaining peripheral and neglected for many years, despite its enormous symbolic significance. In 2019, a special law was adopted enabling construction of a new museum on Westerplatte. A year later, the City of Gdańsk and the Gdańsk Museum were expropriated from the peninsula, and the plot was taken over by the State Treasury. The acquisition of the land for the investment was not without controversy, and the entire conflict was further politicized and ideologically charged. The decision was justified on the grounds that the Westerplatte battlefield has supra-regional significance and should be managed by central authorities, while the municipality was accused of neglecting the area and allowing it to fall into ruin. At the same time, the conflict was aggravated by the fact that, following the change of government in 2015, the Minister of Culture announced that the Museum of the Second World War would be merged with the newly

¹⁷ Samół, W., et al. (2023). Where the Second World War in Europe Broke Out: The Landscape History of Westerplatte, Gdańsk/Danzig. *Land*, 12(3), 596.

¹⁸ Rozporządzenie Prezydenta RP z 22 sierpnia 2003 roku, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20031481448/O/D20031448.pdf>, accessed 10.07.2025.

established Westerplatte and 1939 War Museum. The Minister argued that the museum should present solely the Polish perspective on World War II, whereas the previously planned exhibition had aimed to situate it within a broader narrative of the war, reflecting its universal dimension¹⁹.

Archaeological research conducted on Westerplatte, preceded the implementation of next phases of the Museum of the Second World War branch. Despite the adoption of the law and the merge of the museums, protection of these areas are still challenging due to the absence of a unified management authority, plans for port expansion (including the construction of the Central Port in the eastern part of Westerplatte), and the strategic location of the peninsula, which hosts a military unit occupying the former port warehouses.

Cistercian-Cathedral complex in Oliwa

The former Cistercian abbey in Oliwa, together with its adjacent park, was recognized as a historic monument on 22th November 2017. The historic monument includes the Oliwa Cathedral with its monastic buildings, as well as the park, the cloister, and the grounds of the former manor farm²⁰. The monastery with its church, established at the turn of the 12th and 13th centuries, constitutes one of the oldest and largest examples of monumental architecture in Pomerania²¹.

The problems can again be traced to the fragmented ownership structure (Fig. 8). The former Cistercian complex, with the cathedral at its core, once belonged to the Archdiocese of Gdańsk²². Although the Abbot's Palace complex (architect E. Schröger) is currently used by the National Museum (Modern Art Branch), in 2011 the City of Gdańsk, following the takeover parts of the park from the Church, considered establishing a boutique hotel there. This concept was part of a broader idea of creating the so-called Luxury Zone, which would also include a residential area in the northeastern part of the park, located outside the boundaries of the historic monument. However, it is difficult to reconcile the concept of a luxury space with the fact that this area – as one of many tourist destinations in Gdańsk – is visited by large crowds of tourists.

¹⁹ Snyder, T. (2016). Poland vs. History, *The New York Review*, <https://www.nybooks.com/online/2016/05/03/poland-vs-history-museum-gdansk>

²⁰ Piwek, A. (2006). *Architektura kościoła pocysterskiego w Oliwie od XII do XX wieku. Świątynia zakonna białych mnichów*, Pelplin.

²¹ Piwek, A. (1986). Katedra Oliwska, jej przeszłość i współczesność, *Studia Gdańskie* VI, 61.

²² After the dissolution in 1838, part of the property belonged to the Prussian State, while another part (the church and the museum) remained under the Catholic Church. This property served as the provision for the newly established Diocese of Gdańsk, created in 1925.



Fig. 8. Property ownership of the Cistercian–Cathedral complex in Oliwa. Own elaboration based on: <https://geogdansk.pl/app/pl/?lang=pl%20&page=Strona-glowna>. Map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

Wisłoujście Fortress

The Wisłoujście Fortress was established on the eastern bank of the Martwa Wisła river, on the site of a 16th-century guard post controlling the movement of ships entering and leaving the port. The first brick tower-lighthouse was constructed in 1482, which was surrounded by successive rings of fortifications over the following centuries²³. There is a project carried out within the framework of an OPUS grant, funded by the National Science Centre, to fully document the fortress's architectural heritage²⁴.

After 1945, the fortress came under the ownership of the State Treasury. Initially, it was planned to restore and adopt it for use as a scout base with a marina. However, the development of the port and the establishment of Siarkopol derailed these plans²⁵. Ultimately, in 1975, the fortress was transferred to the Museum of Gdańsk, with a marina and a water police harbor belonging to two other owners. As a result, following the political transformation, there are now three stakeholders (Fig. 9). Despite the dominant role of the Museum of Gdańsk, which undertakes ambitious revitalization projects, there is no coherent conservation policy for this.

²³ Stankiewicz, J. (1956). Twierdza w Wisłoujściu i niektóre problemy związane z jej odbudową, *Ochrona Zabytków* 9/3 (34), 177-180.

²⁴ Grant OPUS 28 „Budowa Twierdzy Wisłoujście (XV-XVII w.) i jej europejskie wzorce”, (funded by National Science Centre, contract no. UMO-2024/55/B/HS2/02609).

²⁵ Krośnicka, K., Wawrzyńska, A. (2023). How the Depths of the Danish Straits Shape Gdańsk's Port and City Spatial Development, *Urban Planning*, 8(3), 349-352, <https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v8i3.6832>



Fig. 9. Property ownership at Wisłoujście Fortress. Own elaboration based on: <https://geogdansk.pl/app/pl/?lang=pl%20&page=Strona-glówna>, map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

Additionally, prior to being added on the list of historic monuments, in 2013 the fortress area was included in the Natura 2000 program²⁶. This requires following the Ustawa z dnia 16 kwietnia 2004 r. o ochronie przyrody (Nature Conservation Act of 16 April 2004), including the requirement to conduct environmental impact assessments for planned activities. Any action within the Wisłoujście Fortress must obtain a decision from the Regional Director for Environmental Protection in Gdańsk (Regionalny Dyrektor Ochrony Środowiska). This situation leads to prolonged administrative procedures and significantly constrains conservation and renovation works, which affects the preservation state of the monument.

The Gdańsk Shipyard - the birthplace of Solidarity Movement

The recognition and preservation of the industrial heritage and history of the former Gdańsk Shipyard continues to generate controversy. Following the collapse of the Gdańsk Shipyard in 1996, there were many attempts to extend protection to these areas²⁷. The Gdańsk Shipyard is the youngest of all historic monuments in Gdańsk, having been entered on the list on 10 December 2018²⁸. Apart from the symbolic significance of its entry as the 100th historic monument directly associated with the NSZZ “Solidarność,” which contributed to the fall of the communist system in the 20th century, the year of its recognition is also not coincidental. In 2018, the list was was

²⁶ Zarządzenie Nr 10 Regionalnego Dyrektora Ochrony Środowiska w Gdańsku z dnia 6 maja 2013 r. w sprawie ustanowienia planu zadań ochronnych dla obszaru Natura 2000 Twierdza Wisłoujście PLH220030.

²⁷ In 1998, the Gdańsk Shipyard was taken over by the private company – Synergia 99.

²⁸ Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 10 grudnia 2018 r. w sprawie uznania za pomnik historii „Gdańsk – Stocznia Gdańska, miejsce narodzin Solidarności” <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20180002506/O/D20182506.pdf>

extended 14 monuments, thereby fulfilling the objective of “100 Historic Monuments for the Centenary of Regaining Independence”²⁹. The historic monument includes the area of the former Kaiserliche Werft Danzig and its adjacent heritage structures, including Plac Solidarności, Gate No. 2, the shipyard’s administration building, and the BHP Room – the site of the signing of the August Agreements. It is quite notable that alongside Plac Solidarności and Gate No. 2, the pass office (biuro przepustek), which was entered in the national registry of historic monuments in 2017, was for unknown reasons wasn’t included in list of historic monuments (Fig. 10)³⁰.

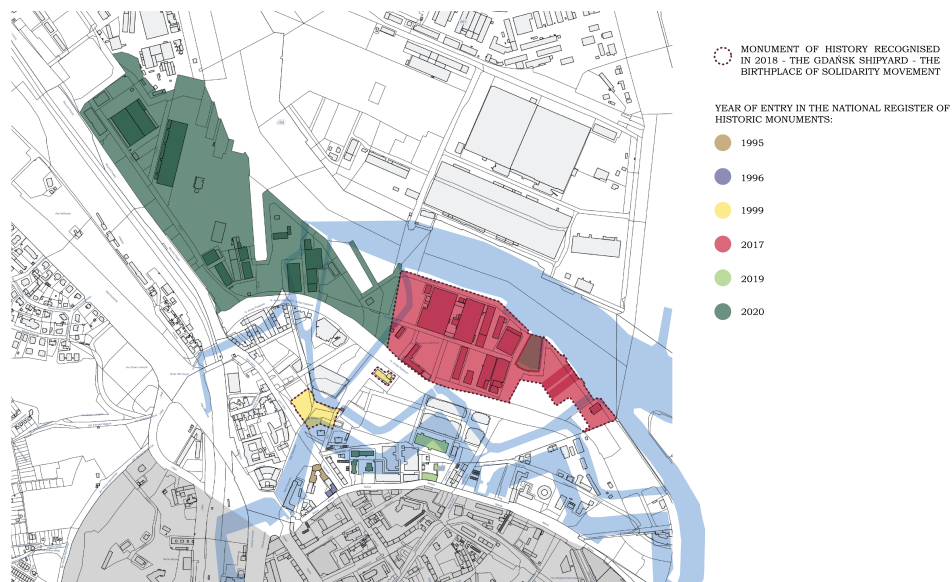


Fig. 10. The area of the historic monument within the Gdańsk Shipyard, along with the chronology of adding individual areas and buildings to the national registry of historic monuments. Own elaborate based on: <https://geogdansk.pl/app/pl/?lang=pl%20&page=Strona-glowna>. Map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

In the 19th century, a shipbuilding materials depot was established on the outskirts of the city center. The initial supply and repair base gradually expanded year by year, and by the mid-19th century, the enterprise was named the Keiserliche Werft Danzig³¹. In 1890, next to the existing shipyard, the Schichau Shipyard was founded. Additionally, so-called timber depots were incorporated into the site. After 1945, both areas became one facility.

²⁹ <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/andrzej-duda/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/100-pomnikow-historii-na-stulecie-odzyskania-przez-polske-niepodleglosci-pleng,1185>, accessed 15.07.2025.

³⁰ The Gate no.2 was added to the national registry of historic monuments in 1999, while the pass office was registered in 2017 – a year later, the Gdańsk Shipyard, the birthplace of Solidarność, was recognized as a historic monument.

³¹ Stavorinus, G. (1990). *Die Geschichte der Königlichen / Kaiserlichen Werft Danzig 1844-1918*, Böhlau, Köln; Wien.

The spatial layout of the shipyard referenced in the literature from 1998 included slipways, basins, docks, and the regular arrangement of shipyard halls – a situation that was soon to change. In 1999, a team of architects, conservators, and engineers led by Professor Wiesław Gruszkowski prepared a report on the condition, historical, artistic, and functional values of seventeen industrial buildings within the Kaiserlich Werft Danzig. They proposed conservation guidelines, which were later used in the development of the New City concept. This concept was widely criticized by Professor Lorens, who accused the authors of being backward-looking and of treating Gdańsk as a historical city, arguing that the city had lost its historical character during the II World War, when it was almost completely destroyed³².

Revitalization concept for the post-shipyard areas acquired by Synergia 99 Ltd. was introduced in year 2000 but preparation of planning documents was carried out in an improper sequence. A cadastral division of the plots owned by the company was developed in 2003. It was not until 2005 that a volumetric study was prepared, intended to supplement the shortcomings of the local spatial development plan (MPZP) adopted in 2004 (lack of height restrictions, lack of building density limitations, allowance for any building forms and roof shapes). The study served only as an auxiliary document without legal force, and the provisions of the MPZP, lacking the guidelines contained in the study, were highly liberal and left considerable freedom to investors. The study soon became ineffective, as Synergia 99 began selling off plots (Fig. 11), thereby losing the right to control those areas. As a result, the legally binding document for these areas remained the 2004 MPZP, which did not incorporate measures included in the study³³. Subsequent demolitions of shipyard infrastructure in following years³⁴ prompted the Provincial Conservator of Monuments (PWKZ) to initiate procedures for adding those structures to national registry of historic monuments. Ultimately, between 2017 and 2020, approximately 75% of the Gdańsk Shipyard on the left bank of the Martwa Wisła River was brought under protection. However, the historic monument status was granted only to the building included in national registry in 2017, as the remaining entries were not legally valid at the time of the presidential decree in 2018.

³² Lorens, P. (2000). Grozi nam prowincjonalizm, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27.04.2000.

³³ Springer, F. (2024). *Szara godzina. Czas na nową architekturę*, Wydawnictwo Karakter, Kraków, 123-131.

³⁴ Between 2002 and 2013, approximately 50% of the shipyard buildings were demolished., Szlaga, M. (2013). *Stocznia/Szlaga*.

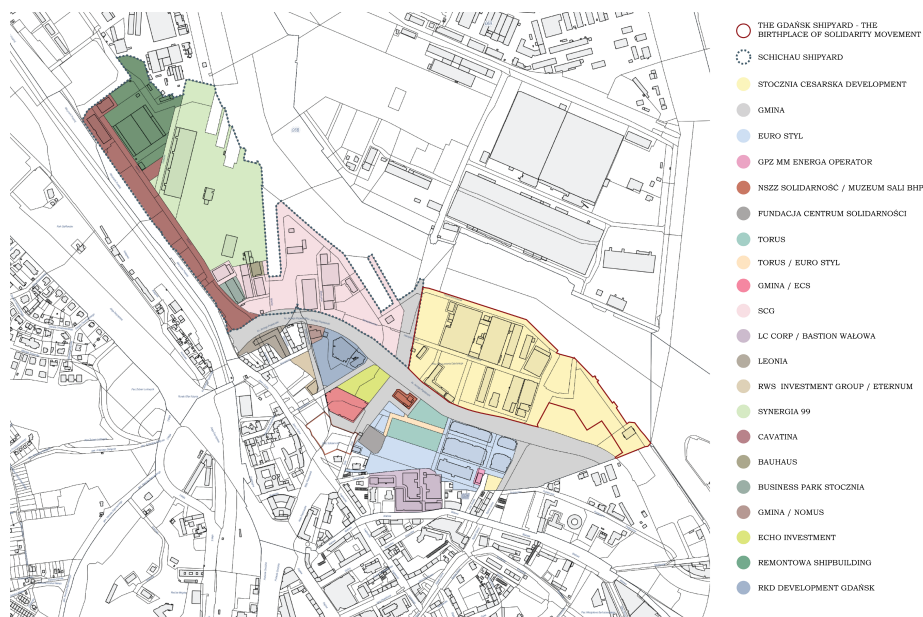


Fig. 11. Property ownership of the shipyard area as of 2022. Own elaboration based on: https://scg.pl/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Oferta-budynku-87B-i-97B_10.2022.pdf. Map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

The lack of a coherent protection policy led to the rejection of the application for entry on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The boundaries of the historic monument, which links the “Road to Freedom” (Gate No. 2 – BHP Room – Budynek Dyrekcji Stoczni) with the Wilhelmine core of the Reichsmarine, remain inconsistent. It should be noted that in 1947 Jan Borowski excluded the shipyard area – although formally located within the seventeenth-century fortifications (Fig. 12) – due to its strategic industrial role and the fact that at the time it was not perceived as cultural heritage. As a result, a strip of land between the Shipyard areas and the Old Town was left without protection of the city’s skyline, a gap that investors already exploited by constructing high-rises (Bastion Wałowa) In 2018, the Marshal of the Pomeranian Voivodeship called for the creation of a cultural park on the site of the former Gdańsk Shipyard.



Fig. 12. Gdańsk Shipyard location related to the 17th-century fortifications. Own elaboration. Map source: <https://ewid.gdansk.gda.pl/e-uslugi/portal-mapowy>

Summary

As already mentioned, a monument of history, although in the light of the law being one of the forms of heritage protection, it is only a special distinction granted to sites of national importance, which does not entail any additional obligations or benefits³⁵. For now, the only potential consequence of being recognised as a historic monument is the possibility of inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage List. However, previous attempts to inscribe Gdańsk's sites on the UNESCO List have failed due to doubts as to whether they sufficiently meet the criteria of authenticity and universality³⁶. Regarding all monuments of history located in Gdańsk, it appears that sites such as the Wisłoujście Fortress or even the former Cistercian complex in Oliwa would have a better chance than Gdańsk within the seventeenth-century fortifications, the Main Town itself, or the former Kaiserliche Werft.

³⁵ Szmygin, B. (2011). System ochrony zabytków w Polsce – próba diagnozy, In: B. Szmygin, B. (2011). *System ochrony zabytków w Polsce – analiza, diagnoza, propozycje*, Polski Komitet Narodowy ICOMOS, Biuro Stołecznego Konserwatora Zabytków Urzędu Miasta Stołecznego Warszawa, Lublin University of Technology, Lublin-Warszawa, 7-9.

³⁶ ICOMOS report for the World Heritage Committee 44th extended session, Fuzhou (China), (2021) <https://whc.unesco.org/document/187993>, 55-71.

In 2008, the Ministry of Culture and Science commissioned a special report on the functioning of Poland's cultural heritage protection system since 1989³⁷. The report highlighted the fact that the recognition as a historic monument carries no practical consequences, as there are no provisions in national law specifying how historic monuments should be protected. It emphasized that sites with this prestigious recognition should be subject to particularly strict supervision by conservators, endowed by law with additional powers and responsibilities³⁸.

In this context, it is noteworthy that the Municipal Program for the Protection of Monuments of the City of Gdańsk for 2024–2027 contains no specific guidelines regarding the protection of this particular category of heritage. It is assumed that the protection of areas designated as historic monuments derives from other, in fact dispersed, forms of heritage protection³⁹. At the same time, the City of Gdańsk has, for the second time in recent years, attempted to establish a cultural park covering only part of a monument (the Main Town, the Zamczysko fragment, the northern tip of Granary Island, and Szafarnia)⁴⁰, which in itself raises doubts about the consistency of protective measures.

The unquestionable value of Gdańsk's monuments of history lies in their diversity – beyond their high symbolic significance, they fulfill different functions and embody various values. They serve as sites of national memory, and at the same time, they represent urban and architectural complexes. Their built environment include not only residential and public utility buildings, but also post-industrial and military structures. Such a wide spectrum of heritage requires the involvement of specialists from many fields. At the same time, the number of professionals dealing with their history and conservation remains limited. Cooperation problems are intensified by frequent political and administrative changes, which directly affect the activities of the Pomeranian Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments and its cooperation with the city⁴¹. The lack of a broader forum for dialogue and reaching consensus makes it extremely difficult to undertake long-term conservation decisions that would enable more effective local heritage management. Each monument has its own unique features that require a comprehensive protection program tailored to individual needs of preservation and promotion.

³⁷ *Raport na temat funkcjonowania systemu ochrony dziedzictwa kulturowego w Polsce po roku 1989*, (Ed.) J. Purchla (2008), Kraków.

³⁸ Ibidem, 69–70.

³⁹ Dziennik Urzędowy Województwa Pomorskiego, Uchwała nr VIII/114/24 Rady Miasta Gdańska z dnia 24 października 2024 roku w sprawie przyjęcia Gminnego Programu Opieki nad Zabytkami Miasta Gdańska na lata 2024–2027.

⁴⁰ In 2023, the city's mayor withdrew the proposal to establish a cultural park for the first time. At the time this article was being submitted for publication, public consultations were underway regarding the establishment of the park for a second time, with slightly different boundaries. In both cases, the Main Town is intended to form the core of the proposed park.

⁴¹ Including the Municipal Conservator of Monuments, who temporarily (in 2015–2018) held the competences of the Pomeranian Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments in the area of Gdańsk—excluding the Main Town and the approval of planning acts.

Creating a program focused on the coordination and cooperation of all stakeholders (city authorities, conservators, urban planners, community representatives, and property owners within monuments of history) would allow for more effective use of the city's cultural assets, while minimizing problems resulting from fragmented ownership and divided competences. Proposing a local system to fill the gap in the national legal framework would provide an opportunity to develop more effective tools for the protection and promotion of monuments of history.

The current system of protection is ineffective, as it rests solely on symbolic recognition, without real legal or financial instruments. In Gdańsk, where there is an exceptionally high concentration of various types of monuments of history, this problem is particularly evident. Although each of Gdańsk's monuments of history faces different challenges, a common denominator remains the absence of a coherent management program. The absence (or being outdated) of local spatial development plans for some areas results in situations where the lack of formal planning documents leads to the shaping of public spaces in an accidental manner, often subordinated to the interests of the strongest – particularly in areas of high investment pressure. This leads to spatial chaos and deteriorates the historical character of these areas.

Finally, when addressing the issue of Gdańsk's monuments of history, the influence of politics on the scope and nature of heritage protection cannot be overlooked. This has been especially evident at Westerplatte Battlefield monument, where decisions were made not only in the interest of historical truth, the preservation of the battlefield, and filling of important gaps in knowledge, but also under the influence of ideology and conflict between the ministry and the city. Meanwhile, in the case of the former Gdańsk Shipyard, the pragmatic desire to enable downtown development led, after 2004, to such significant transformations that, twenty years later, the prospects of UNESCO inscription for this area have become illusory. Will the establishment of a cultural park covering the Main Town and its immediate surroundings ensure better protection of at least this part of another Gdańsk monument of history? The outcome will be verified in the long term. It is certain that the five Gdańsk monuments of history share the same underlying problem: the lack of a coherent protection policy, and even the absence of a specialized institution – within the Office of the Pomeranian Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments or the City Architect's Office – exclusively dedicated to them and equipped with adequate competences.

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Grant OPUS 28 „Budowa Twierdzy Wisłoujście (XV–XVII w.) i jej europejskie wzorce”, funded by National Science Center, contract no. UMO-2024/55/B/HS2/02609.

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