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ART AND ARTISTS IN CITY SPACE
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
OF ART-BASED REVITALISATION/GENTRIFICATION IN POLAND
IN BOTH THE COMMUNIST AND NEO-LIBERAL REALITY:
ELBLĄG BIENNALE OF SPATIAL FORMS
AND GDAŃSK SHIPYARD CASE STUDIES*

This paper addresses the issue of creating new art forms in the city space, in two different political and economic realities: communist and neoliberal Poland. I will examine the phenomenon of the biennales organised throughout the 1960s with the example of the 1st Elbląg Biennale of Spatial Forms from 1965, as well as contemporary regeneration processes through the activities of various artists: the case study of the Gdańsk Shipyard. These artistic phenomena will be placed into the context of the political and economic realities of communist Poland of the 1960s, during this period, a balance was sought between artistic freedom and political limitations. The realities of contemporary Poland will also be discussed, the 1989 democratic transition took place with the economically based participation of artists in the transformation process of the post-industrial shipyard areas against a background of hard market laws.¹

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¹ Apart from two case studies presented here, one may obviously point to other spectacular examples of artistic interference in the public space of Polish cities. They concern the communist

Several aspects of the Elbląg Biennale (i.e. Baraniewski; Błotnicka-Mazur, “The image of Art”; “The Taming of Space”; Leśniewska 83-152) and the issue of the fate of Gdańsk Shipyard (Kozik; Błotnicka-Mazur, “Rewitalizacja”) have recently been addressed, however, there is a need for a comparative perspective. In the contemporary world, the culture-forming role of artistic activities in the public space, as well as their influence on local communities would seem to be obvious. The topic of the agency of art in the initiation of the national revitalisation process has been the subject of much debate in recent times.² This just confirms that it is a fruitful direction for further inquiry. Before the narrative moves on to examine selected case studies, the two title terms are going to be the main focus of this review.

The connections between art and the regeneration of the urban fabric have of course been raised before, especially since the 1980s. Such activities focused on the revitalisation of downgraded districts of the cities, and had different characteristics. There are several terms which accompany these processes. The most common ones are revitalisation and gentrification. Both of these terms are interrelated and difficult to distinguish clearly. Gentrification – according to a short definition is: “the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the city centre into middle class residential and/or commercial use” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly XV). Gentrification therefore means changes within city areas, social as well as spatial. This term describes the transformation of housing infrastructure, social structures and the image of the estate. Thomas Maloutas indicates the ambivalent notion of gentrification: its advantages for the processes of urban regeneration against the “bleak fate of displaced residents from renovated areas” (33). Revitalisation, in turn, is a term drawn from biology and medicine, and has unequivocal positive connotations. It may be associated with the return of vital powers or revival, in this case the revival of the urban fabric. Urban revitalisation is,

period of the 1960s and 1970s; i.e. I Sympozjum Artystów Plastyków i Naukowców [First Symposium of Visual Artists and Scientists] in Puławy (1966) or Lubelskie Spotkania Plastyczne [Lublin Visual Arts Meetings] (1976-1979), as well as contemporary artistic practices contributing to the revitalisation processes of the urban fabric. It is worth mentioning i.e. the activity of the Urban Forms Foundation in Łódź established in 2008, the project of *Poznań. Miasto Sztuki* [Poznań. City of Art] initiated in 2005 by Wielkopolskie Towarzystwo Zachęty Sztuk Pięknych [Greater Poland Society for the Encouragement of Fine Arts] or Międzynarodowe Biennale Sztuki Zewnętrznej OUT OF STH [International Biennale of External Art OUT OF STH] organised by BWA Wrocław – Galerie Sztuki Współczesnej [Contemporary Art Galleries] in Wrocław since 2008.

² They refer to particular case studies; i.e. Jagannath; Luger and Ren, as well as provide a wider perspective; i.e. Deutsche; Kwon; Lacy.

by its nature, an interventionist act, which may be influenced by changing economic, social, environmental and political circumstances (Roberts 22). Maloutas noted that policy makers and investors tend to avoid the term gentrification, and instead refer to urban revitalisation or urban “renaissance” (Maloutas 33). Neil Smith accentuated the slight difference between the way gentrification was defined for the first time by Ruth Glass in 1964 as a discrete process “whereby a new urban ‘gentry’ [middle class – EBM] transformed working-class quarters” (xviii), and the more contemporary term of “Urban Renaissance,” coined by a special Urban Task Force in London in 1999 (Smith 438).

In order to compare the two title cases and find out more about the character of the artists’ agency in developing the regeneration process, the narrative will proceed chronologically with the case study of the city of Elbląg and the 1st Biennale of Spatial Forms in 1965.³ At the very beginning, it is necessary to outline the political and artistic situation in the post-World War II Polish People’s Republic which was unique, but also similar to other Soviet satellite countries.⁴ Efforts were made to resume the dialogue between Polish and other European art which had been broken by war trauma, these efforts were undertaken during the immediate postwar years, but ceased in the face of socialist realism restrictions that were imposed on artists in 1949.⁵ At the time, it looked like there was no room for modern, abstract works any more, they were treated as suppressed formalism. However, the situation changed when the socialist realism period in art definitively ended, this occurred due to the political changes introduced in 1956 by the new communist leader, Władysław Gomułka (T. Kemp-Welch). The legendary “Arsenał” exhibition in 1955 in Warsaw is symbolically treated as the artistic forerunner of the political “thaw” after the Polish October 1956. Its participants rejected the contemporary soc-realist doctrine, by presenting many paintings with a strong expressionist eloquence.⁶

³ I am aware that the way in which the sculptural results of the Elbląg Biennale as well as the Gdańsk initiatives are presented is brief and selective. However, a deep analysis of all of the created forms/activities far exceeds the scope and acceptable volume of the article.

⁴ The issue of the results of the Yalta Conference (February 4-11, 1945) and the division of Europe into European Western and Soviet spheres of influence are commonly known facts, however, for further reading consult the most recent book of Diana Preston.

⁵ For more information about socialist realism in Poland see Włodarczyk; Poklewski.

⁶ Expressionist threads of this exhibition titled Ogólnopolska Wystawa Młodej Plastyki *Przeciw wojnie przeciw faszyzmowi* [National Exhibition of Young Visual Arts “Against War, Against Fascism”] were strongly accentuated by the art critics and scholars as noted by Balisz-Schmelz,

From then on, artists commonly started to create abstract works of art, some forms of which found support among the new policy makers – at least at the beginning of this new political situation. The latter decided to accept the ideas of modernism, which is typically art that only engages with artistic problems, that is, it is generally politically neutral.⁷ It was convenient for the authorities to appear liberal, and give the artists at least the illusion of freedom, by permitting formal experiments and accepting non-objective works of art. In fact, communist authorities could easily exert pressure on those artists suspected of improper political involvement. This reserved approval for modernism was a part of an intentional game that was played between the authorities and modern artists. Another important aspect of this saga is that the state had almost unlimited financial resources at its disposal, which were necessary for the organisation of such big artistic events as Elbląg Biennale (Piotrowski, *Znaczenia* 125).

Throughout the 1960s in particular, artists organised symposiums, workshops and plein air events with generous national financial support, these events were treated by the authorities as an element of official communist propaganda, connected with the so-called “Recovered Territories” (Pol. “Ziemie Odzyskane”) that became part of Poland after World War II. They were treated as an element of official policy, which defined postwar Poland as an heir to the medieval past of Piast’s realm (Davies 392-400). In order to obtain a more favourable attitude towards various initiatives, the artists had to come up with propaganda slogans, e.g. by combining concepts from the field of art and industry or including the celebration of important anniversaries like the “return” of the Western and Northern Territories to the “mother country” (Piotrowski, *Znaczenia* 125).

In considering the topic of this article, the First Biennale of Spatial Forms in Elbląg (1965) is one of the most spectacular examples of an artistic event, it resulted in the creation of a few dozen metal art works by a group of artists supported by the Zamech mechanical plant, which are still present in the public space of that city, it is a city belonging to the “Recovered Territories.” It is important to note the most characteristic points in Elbląg’s history and emphasise the issue of how the city looked at that moment (Fig. 1). The city which is located approximately 55 kilometres (34 miles)

who analysed the reception of this exhibition in the light of the “German-German” dispute concerning Expressionism.

⁷ I use the term “modernism” in the same way that Piotr Piotrowski used it in his books, i.e.: *In the Shadow of Yalta; W cieniu Duchampa* 27-48.

south-east of Gdańsk, was originally founded by the Teutonic Knights early in the 13th century. Over the centuries, Elbląg – Elbing in German – changed its affiliation between Poles and Germans, and during the interwar period it was a German city. It was almost completely ruined within a couple of months at the end of WW2 after the Soviet siege. According to the Potsdam Conference agreements, Elbing, along with the northern region became a part of Poland. Almost all Germans who remained in the city were expelled during the following months. Some parts of the damaged Old City centre were demolished and the historic bricks were used to rebuild Gdańsk and Warsaw with reference to the slogan: “The Entire Nation Builds its Capital” (“Cały naród buduje swoją stolicę”).

The state of the city at its lowest ebb was familiar to the initiator of the Biennale, Gerard Jürgen Blum-Kwiatkowski (1930-2015). It is instructive that he was born in Faulen (today Polish Ulnowo), on the then territory of East Prussia and, after the border changes he decided to remain in Poland and settled in Elbląg. In 1961, he set up the El Gallery⁸ – the Art Laboratory which is still one of the most important places for Polish postwar art (Denisiuk and Opalewski). It is worth pointing out that he established his gallery in the ruined former Dominican church – naturally with the permission of the local National Council Presidium (Pol. Prezydium Rady Narodowej). Such a “revitalisation” was realised by the arrival of artists into the sacred space that perfectly corresponded with the official communist policy of the secularisation of society. Most likely, for this reason alone, Kwiatkowski won the approval of the authorities (Denisiuk 5).

In July 1965, the First Biennale of Spatial Forms in Elbląg was inaugurated by Kwiatkowski and Marian Bogusz (1920-1980) – the cocreator of Krzywe Koło Gallery in Warsaw⁹ – under the patronage of Elbląg Mechanical Factory ZAMECH, along with about fifty artists – participants in the event. It is worth noting that at the time ZAMECH was the largest producer of turbines and other components for the shipyard industry in all of Poland. The original, ideological programme of the Biennale was created by Kwiatkowski together with Marian Bogusz.¹⁰ The assumptions of the event strongly accentuated the obligations of the new artists and the evolution of visual forms. The function of a work of art in the context of the surrounding reality

⁸ The gallery was officially opened on March 27th 1962.

⁹ For more information about Marian Bogusz and his activity in organising such big artistic events in particular see Kowalska.

¹⁰ Detailed assumptions see *Założenia ideowo-artystyczne*.

had changed, Bogusz argued. The traditional idea of painting and sculpture became devalued by the new materials used by the artists. The works of art created should become the focal point of a certain area, but take into consideration the existing components, i.e. greenery and architecture (Bogusz 10). In order to convince the city policymakers to accept the Biennale formula, the organisers also accentuated the financial values of the projected structures, which were supposed to transform the aesthetic image of the city and shape, as well as sensitise its inhabitants (*Założenia ideowo-artystyczne*).

Kwiatkowski was employed by ZAMECH as a visual artist, and that is why he saw the relationship between art, the public space and reality even more clearly. The artists – sculptors as well as painters, were supposed to choose a certain place within the area defined by the organisers in the city of Elbląg, and then design and finally make a spatial form, destined for a particular location (Kwiatkowski 5-6). By placing the form in social surroundings, it engaged with the space of the city, and also announced a revaluation of the pre-war idea of art and praxis integration, which is often presumed to be utopian.¹¹ Władysław Strzemiński (1893-1952), a Polish avant-garde artist, in his famous debate with Leon Chwistek (1884-1944) in 1934 argued the following:

Due to the industrialisation of art, and its active organisational role, we go beyond the present necessity to paint pictures to hang on walls. The utilitarian-social justification for the painting originates from its characteristics as an inventive experiment concerning the form and stimulating the organisational possibilities of daily life.¹²

In Elbląg, the artist was supposed to leave his/her atelier and supported by engineers, technicians and labourers co-create a spatial form as a natural element of the urban space. The ideas of the First Biennale were indeed an innovative experiment, comprising a modern form of patronage as well as incorporating a work of art into ordinary life (Bogusz 10). Gerard Kwiatkowski dreamt of a bright future filled with “the cities – pictures” and about

¹¹ Tomasz Załuski discusses such a single-track evaluation of the avant-garde, indicating its pragmatic activities and initiatives, by shaping his research around the ideas and their implementation by Władysław Strzemiński; Załuski 35.

¹² “Przez industrializację sztuki i jej czynną rolę w organizowaniu wychodzimy poza dotychczasową konieczność malowania obrazów do zawieszania na ścianach. Obraz znajduje swoje uzasadnienie utylitarno-społeczne jako wynalazczy eksperyment w zakresie formy, zapładniający organizacyjne możliwości życia codziennego”; Strzemiński 120. Translations from Polish by the author, if not otherwise stated.

the whole world resembling a huge work of art (Kwiatkowski). He also remained optimistic about the active involvement of the residents of Elbląg during the event: “We want the spatial forms, placed in various locations in the city, to form a bond with people, (...) to initiate the process of reflection” (Kwiatkowski). These remarks touched upon two important questions of the pre-war ideas of the 1920’s: the modernist autonomy of the work of art and the constructivist alliance between artists and factory workers.¹³

In practical terms, the artists, according to the Biennale's policy, had at their disposal scrapped materials – industrial metal waste provided by ZAMECH. Within a short period of time, between 23 July and 22 August, they produced most of the structures which had been designed earlier. Due to technical issues, the first projects designed were quite often modified, under the supervision of factory technicians as well as with the approval of the organisers. As a result, most of the created forms were situated along Tysiąclecia Avenue, Rycerska Street or R. Traugutt Park, among other locations, and presented a simple, abstract shape, often based on repetitive units of circles or triangles.

At the very least, it is worth mentioning several examples of sculptural forms created during the 1st Elbląg Biennale.¹⁴ Henryk Stażewski (1894-1988), a co-founder of Polish Constructivism, represented geometric abstraction in the 1920’s and early 30’s and after the figurative period evolved into reliefs around 1960. Stażewski’s spatial form in Elbląg seems to be a continuation of his interests as a painter. It is constructed from asteroidally shaped plates that curve upward. Though three-dimensional it is supposed to be viewed frontally from Słowiański Square (Fig. 2). One of the favourites of the residents of Elbląg is a form created by Lech Kunka (1920-1978), from its shape it is associated with European bison. The structure resembles a honeycomb made from a combination of pipes with a similar cross-section (Fig. 3). Zbigniew Gostomski (1932-2017), in turn, is the author of an intriguing composition into which he transferred the optical problems he was solving in his painting. It is a simple but well-considered structure made from two curved sheets of metal, which are combined in a mirror image of each other. They generate a tension enclosed within a thick frame which is frontally invisible but clearly seen when the viewer changes his/her location (Fig. 4).

¹³ The programmatic presence of several aspects of the constructivist tradition in Elbląg event is mentioned by Piotr Juskiewicz 144-152.

¹⁴ A complete catalogue accompanying the event, with graphic design by Marian Bogusz, evoked a pre-war constructivist typography promoted by Blok and Praesens artistic groups.

A few dozen of these art objects situated in the urban space attracted the interest of an intrigued public when they first appeared. Grzegorz Kowalski who participated in the Second Biennale in Elbląg in 1967, mentioned that after the initial interest of the citizens, the “art became a mirage for them, creating a festive atmosphere for a short time. Thereafter, the footprints of the artists’ activities were covered with dust and rust, and nobody paid attention to them”¹⁵ (108-109). However, this phenomenon is natural and confirms that for residents new objects in the public space quickly become familiar.

The city which had been wounded so deeply at the end of World War II, despite or perhaps because of the destruction remained an inspiring living laboratory for the artists, who were able to hear its pulse and complete the message it transmitted. Some Polish art theoreticians took a critical view of the Biennale (Leśniewska 139-152). They drew attention to various issues, i.a. disorder in the arrangement of the forms within the city, as well as a lack of intuition for the appropriate scale of the works. However, all of them admitted that it was the biggest experiment of the decade, combining art and industry in Poland, and also in Europe, and that the experiment was realised in the city space on a large scale.¹⁶

Despite appearances, after the democratic transition of 1989, the relationship between artists and the authorities in charge of public city spaces neither became easier nor less problematic. The former political discourse gave way to the hard laws of economics – the story of Gdańsk Shipyard, the birthplace of “Solidarity” trade union, is the best example of this phenomenon. Artistic activities have been performed as a tribute to the process of the urban regeneration within the area of Gdańsk Shipyard since the year 2000. However, the history of the shipyard dates back to the 19th century. The shipyard as well as the harbour determined the economic power of Gdańsk and was one of the biggest employers around the region. A modern shipbuilding industry had been initiated there by the Prussian government which in 1844 created the Royal Base of Corvettes (Ger. *Königlicher Korvetten-Depot-Platz*) on Martwa Wisła (Eng. *Dead Vistula*), which was later transformed into the Royal Shipyard (Ger. *Königlicher Werft*, 1849), and

¹⁵ “(...) sztuka jest dla nich mirażem, dającym na krótko poczucie święta. Później ślady aktywności artystów pokrywały kurz i rdza i nikt się nimi nie interesował.”

¹⁶ Some such big artistic events resulted in the creation of projects only, i.e. Visual Arts Symposium Wrocław '70 or the visual arts meeting “Space of the City,” organised in Chełm in 1978.

then into the Imperial Shipyard (Ger. *Kaiserliche Werft*, 1871). After the German surrender in WW1, the victorious powers took over the shipyard (1922), and then it reverted to German control again after the outbreak of WW2 (1940). When the war ended and Gdańsk became part of Poland, the Gdańsk Shipyard soon revived and combined with the neighbouring Schichau Shipyard which was shortlisted as one of the world's best companies of this type. In the 1960s and 1970s the employment level of the Shipyard settled at around 15 000 workers (Sebastyański, "Tożsamość lokalna" 99-100).

The contemporary history of this place is closely connected with the Polish independence movement against the ruling communist regime. This site commemorates the tragic events of December 1970, when a workers' strike was violently crushed. A decade later, in August 1980, strikes broke out, which gave birth to the world famous Solidarity movement, the first independent trade union which activity campaigned for the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc.¹⁷

After the 1989 democratic transition, the state economy had to be subordinated to market rules, and therefore the financial situation of the Shipyard changed dramatically. The loss of existing sales markets together with the provision of financial support for ships under construction, caused a dramatic increase in the indebtedness of the company. Without governmental support, the shipyard was declared bankrupt in 1996 and a part of its premises became deprived of manufacturing functions. Reduced production was concentrated on Ostrów Island (62.5 ha, less than 50% of the entire area), and an area of 76 ha near the centre of the city of Gdańsk was sold to a land developer with American capital Synergy 99. It seemed that a new manager was going to transform this quarter into a new district of Gdańsk: Young City.¹⁸ Roman Sebastyański, the then marketing director of Synergy, decided to incorporate the shipyard area into the urban space by introducing young artists and letting them work in the useless empty post-shipyard buildings. Thus the company, with the cooperation of public officials invited artists to live and work there in order to protect this zone from further degradation. Such an intervention was supposed to stimulate the area and cause a change in the way it was perceived according to the conventional wisdom of the Gdańsk inhabitants through art and alternative culture.¹⁹

¹⁷ Further reading: Kubik.

¹⁸ Young City is a historical name, it originated from the Teutonic Order in 1380. After the Teutonic Knights had been expelled in the 15th century, Gdańsk citizens tore the city down and the area became a defensive foreground of Gdańsk up until the 19th century; further reading: Samól.

¹⁹ See more: „Stoczniowcy,” <http://szlaga.blogspot.com/2011/12/stoczniowcy.html>, accessed 15 June 2020.

This place and its residents have changed considerably. Some of the artistic activities are not being continued anymore, which is undoubtedly connected with changes in ownership or at least in the management of the area. However, it is instructive to mention the most characteristic ones. The Colony of Artists was the first artistic initiative that appeared. It aimed to support young unknown artists with a place to create their art. In winter 2001 Synergy handed over two buildings to be used by the Colony: the former Telephone Exchange and the “little BHP” building (occupational health and safety, Polish BHP), which was quickly adapted for studio use. The numbers of artists, who, at the beginning, created next to the still working ship-labourers – increased naturally, presenting different forms of activities. So this environment was flexible and mobile as well as open (Sebastyański, “Artystyczna kolonizacja” 159). However, The Colony of Artists, which pioneered here, lost its main home after a couple of years. At the beginning of 2008, the Baltic Property Trust, the new owner of the majority of the area, took over the Telephone Exchange building no. 175A, offering instead another facility which deprived the artists of the possibilities to organise exhibitions and concerts.²⁰ The planned adaptation of building no. 175A for the office use, never materialised and instead, the building remained empty. Moreover, it appeared on an application paper for demolition, along with another twelve buildings. Due to the activity of the Pomeranian Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments, at the moment, most of the historic buildings of the former Imperial and Schichau Shipyards are preserved through their inclusion on a Registry of Objects of Cultural Heritage.²¹

The idea of Solidarity took on a new meaning in this place. Two apparently separate worlds: the remaining active shipyard workers and the young artists who were just starting out would never have been expected to reconcile. However, the artists noted and appreciated these ordinary people – the creators of the place, its history and various contexts. Due to their sensibility and ability to listen, they became close to the workers. One of the important artistic missions was to preserve a social consciousness of the

²⁰ More about the Colony of Artists see <http://www.kolonia-artystow.pl/>, accessed 7 October 2020.

²¹ In March 2016 Dariusz Chmielewski, Pomeranian Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments, started a procedure to enter the entirety of the Imperial Shipyard into the Registry of Objects of Cultural Heritage. The next procedure was initiated in 2017 and the last one in January 2020. At the end of the same month, the Polish Ministry of Culture and National Heritage submitted an application for placing the Shipyard on the Unesco World Heritage List, this was positively verified in February; Tunia.

testimony of people who in the end had been made redundant from the shipyard (Sebastyański, “Artystyczna kolonizacja” 170).

In 2004 Iwona Zając, inspired by *Dockstories* by Anna Oliver (2003) in Bristol,²² finished her mural *Shipyard* on a 250-m² wall surrounding the shipyard (Fig. 5). It was a visual record of the artist’s conversations with the workers of the Gdańsk Shipyard. Zając has had a studio there since 2002, and witnessed transformations arising within the shipyard area: inefficient attempts at privatisation, a gradual decline and the dismissals of personnel. The artist recorded her conversations with people she met every day. Then, she transcribed these recordings and painted the enlarged texts on the wall using stencils. Zając put stylised blue and black phrases on the light blue background of the twenty three fencing panels between panoramic shipyard landscapes, which were also created with a stencil technique. The artist also painted two naked full-length self-portraits with wings constructed from shipyard cranes. The inhabitants of the area soon called her the “shipyard Nike” (Fig. 6).

Zając seems to be a postmodern artist who listens intently to the various social narratives and tries to give them an aesthetic shape to make a clear message for the wider public (Wołodźko). She crystallised the emotional memories and reflections of the shipyard workers with her mural and included a transcription of the “oral history” of the shipyard as told by the direct witnesses of certain events. As the author of the work Zając remained in the shadows, thereby giving the floor to members of the local society, the main recipients of the work. This multidimensional project appeared in the form of the new technology of virtual reality because of the next move of the developer. The mural wall was demolished in January 2013 due to the investment of building a new road to connect Gdańsk with Young City. The question of what to do about the mural was considered. Some officials contemplated the possibility of translocating Zając’s work which at that point had already been inscribed into the minds of its admirers as a permanent element of the public space. The artist decided, however, that being a part of the wall her mural should share its fate. Her symbolic farewell gesture was to paint over her work with black paint at the end of 2012. Zając left behind just a few words, “scars on the wall” (*Nike odchodzi*). The demolition of the wall gave rise to a new artistic impulse and Iwona Zając “translocated” her project into virtual space. On the web site *Shipyard on Air*

²² For more information about the project *Dialogue* organised by Independent Artists Network see Vaz-Pinheiro.

(stoczniaweterze.com/ENG/) there are recordings of the artist's conversations with shipyard workers, and photographs of the mural and video films.²³

Last but not least, in this subjective overview, Subjective Bus Line was also a project which enabled the shipyard workers to speak out independently. It started in 2002 within the framework of the international conference *City Transformers*. The initiator, Grzegorz Klaman is an artist who has been engaged in artistically stimulating the different districts of Gdańsk since 1984 – especially the Gdańsk Shipyard grounds. In actual fact the project included a guided tour around the Shipyard area. The passengers in a cucumber-style retro bus travelled around and listened to the subjective stories told by the witnesses of the legendary events – former Shipyard workers who became the guides of this special tour, which revealed lesser known but equally important aspects of the history of the shipyard (Fig. 7). When the project started the Shipyard was already inaccessible for ordinary people, as it was surrounded by a wall. The Subjective Bus Line opened up the whole area again, and brought the grounds closer to the local residents by creating a public space (*Subiektywna Linia Autobusowa*).

CONCLUSION

Revitalisation and gentrification are complex issues. They may have positive as well as negative results – this particularly applies to the second term. According to the chronicled artistic events of the 1960s which were supported and financed by the communist authorities, we may observe a specific type of “revitalisation” *en passant*. However, the real goal of policy makers was different and was actually connected with transferring the existing support for fine arts from the centre to the peripheries of the newly organised country. Also, the communist authorities had to constantly confirm the Polish presence in the West and North Territories, the term used was the “Recovered” territories. The artists, in turn, grasped every available opportunity to make their art and to expose it in a public space. The case study of Elbląg, a city with a long and difficult history, is unique. During the 1st Biennale of Spatial Forms, the artists introduced their sculptures –

²³ Film *Shipyard Nike is Leaving* (5'12", camera: Justyna Orłowska; editing: Iwona Zajęc, Justyna Orłowska; music: Krzysztof Topolski; Gdańsk 2012-2013), and its reverse *Farewell* (5'12", camera: Justyna Orłowska; editing: Iwona Zajęc, Justyna Orłowska; music: Krzysztof Topolski; Gdańsk 2014).

installations which resided within the context of a ruined city, a city which at that moment was “using 450 gas lamps after the onset of darkness” (Juszkiewicz 141), and the central quarter of which only experienced the rebuilding process in the 1980s. Despite objections presented by the Biennale critics concerning, i.a. the rather haphazard placement of the forms, they were undoubtedly something new and stimulating.

The case of Gdańsk Shipyard presents a simultaneous planned revitalisation and gentrification of the de-industrialised part of the city, except that in this case the development was dependent on the laws of the market. Gdańsk Shipyard is a symbol of political change and freedom. It is also a symbol of artistic freedom. The idea of introducing artists into the degraded area was met with enthusiasm. Several years of artistic activity had revealed the predominance of the efficacy of the grassroots initiative over commercial practice. The multidimensional presence of the artists contributed to the revitalisation of the isolated and degraded post-shipyard grounds and the area became a fashionable spot. Some projects (by Iwona Zając or Subjective Bus Line) revitalised not only the material fabric of the area, but also ensured the presence of people – former shipyard’s workers – who had the opportunity to tell their stories to the younger generation. However, the subsequent owners of the grounds presumed that these initiatives were a short-term form of revitalisation. Over time, some of the facilities adapted by the artists – being original 19th century industrial structures – were demolished, i.e. the building of the Model Workshop or Pattern Shop (demolished in 2012). The other buildings were fortunately entered into the Registry of Objects of Cultural Heritage. This fact allowed the Polish Ministry of Culture to submit an application to place the Shipyard on the Unesco World Heritage List, this application was positively verified in February 2020.

In both cases the artists depended and still depend on external circumstances: in communist times they received financial support but they paid the price of political censorship, when the artists had to operate in the free market, in reality they were dependent on the decisions of private developers and hard economic calculation. The city, however, undoubtedly benefits from the presence of the artists and their various activities. One of the main aims of this paper was to reveal one of the most important roles of contemporary artists; their social function, artists who do not attempt to preserve the space, but rather always seek to express a new dimension of the community and its diverse contexts.

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ART AND ARTISTS IN CITY SPACE
POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS
OF ART-BASED REVITALISATION/GENTRIFICATION IN POLAND
IN BOTH THE COMMUNIST AND NEO-LIBERAL REALITY:
ELBLĄG BIENNALE OF SPATIAL FORMS
AND GDAŃSK SHIPYARD CASE STUDIES

S u m m a r y

This paper addresses and compares the issue of introducing new art forms into the city space in order to revitalise or gentrify it, in two different political and economic realities: that of Poland under Communism and in the era of the free market. The phenomenon of the biennales, which were most frequently organised in the 1960s, is analysed, based mainly on the First Elbląg Biennale of Spatial Forms in 1965, as is one contemporary revitalisation process which has been achieved thanks to artistic activity, namely, the case of the Gdańsk Shipyard. These artistic phenomena are presented against the backdrop of the political and economic realities of Communist Poland in the 1960s, where they had to find a balance between artistic freedom and political limitations, as well as contemporary post-1989 Poland, where economically-conditioned artistic activities (intended to revitalise the post-shipyard space) clash with the hard rules of the free-market economy.

Keywords: public space; gentrification; revitalisation; Biennale of Spatial Forms in Elbląg; Gdańsk Shipyard.

SZTUKA I ARTYŚCI W PRZESTRZENI MIASTA
POLITYCZNE I EKONOMICZNE UWARUNKOWANIA REWITALIZACJI /
GENTRYFIKACJI W POLSCE KOMUNISTYCZNEJ I WOLNORYNKOWEJ.
PRZYPADEK BIENNALE FORM PRZESTRZENNYCH
W ELBLĄGU I STOCZNI GDAŃSKIEJ

Streszczenie

Artykuł w sposób komparatystyczny podejmuje zagadnienie wprowadzenia nowych form sztuki, w funkcji rewitalizacyjnej bądź gentryfikacyjnej, w przestrzeń miasta w dwóch różnych realiach polityczno-ekonomicznych: w komunistycznej i wolnorynkowej Polsce. Przeanalizowano zjawisko biennale, organizowanych szczególnie często w dekadzie lat 60., na przykładzie I Biennale Form Przestrzennych w Elblągu z 1965 r., jak również współczesne procesy rewitalizacyjne przestrzeni miasta poprzez aktywność artystów – przypadek Stoczni Gdańskiej. Wymienione zjawiska natury artystycznej zostały osadzone w realiach polityczno-ekonomicznych odpowiednio Polski komunistycznej dekady lat 60., balansującej pomiędzy wolnością artystyczną a politycznymi ograniczeniami, oraz Polski współczesnej, po transformacji 1989 r., w której uwarunkowane ekonomicznie działania artystów na rzecz rewitalizacji dawnych terenów postoczniowych ścierają się z twardymi prawami wolnego rynku.

Słowa kluczowe: przestrzeń publiczna; gentryfikacja; rewitalizacja; Biennale Form Przestrzennych w Elblągu; Stocznia Gdańska.



1. Elbląg, Old Town in 1945, phot. by J. Bułhak, after: K. Czarnocki, A. Przysiecki.
Elbląg 1945 i dziś. Wydawnictwo Interpress, 1968, p. 31



2. Henryk Stażewski, Spatial form, Elbląg, contemporary view,
phot. by K. Mazur



3. Lech Kunka, Spatial form ("Bison"), Elbląg, contemporary view,
phot. by K. Mazur



4. Zbigniew Gostomski, Spatial form, Elbląg, contemporary view,
phot. by K. Mazur



5. Iwona Zajęc, mural *Shipyard* on the wall surrounding the Gdańsk Shipyard, phot. by Magda Małysiak, courtesy of Iwona Zajęc



6. Iwona Zajęc, *Shipyard Nike*, fragment of the mural on the wall surrounding the Gdańsk Shipyard, phot. by Michał Szlaga, courtesy of Iwona Zajęc



7. Bus Jelcz 043 at Gdańsk Shipyard – part of the project *Subjective Bus Line*,
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