Abstract: The architectural heritage and the mode of its analysis and interpretation, specially in the perspective of national and regional question, can and often becomes the issue prone to manipulation. The attempts to define national and regional identity by means of cultural legacy have been accompanying the research into art and also the creation of modern architecture in the spirit of national Historicism already since the 19th century. The architecture of Gdansk has for years been the subject of a heated debate of both German and Polish architects, historians of architecture, and conservators. In the recent years also politicians have joined in the debate, and so have writers. The paper analyses the issue of the relation of architectural forms and rhetorical formulas, namely the combination of architecture and specific contents treated as signs of local identity, as well as changeability and interpretational flexibility of those issues with regard to the needs of political circumstances (idioms versus interpretational variants, stereotypes, research myths, likenings versus scholarly idiosyncrasies). Special attention will be paid to the Gdansk architecture of the 2nd half of the 19th century and its contemporary and later interpretations in the perspective of regional and national identification.

Keywords: architecture of the 19. and 20. centuries, national identification, Neo-Renaissance, Danzig, Gdansk, history of architecture

The architectural heritage and the mode of its analysis and interpretation, specially in the perspective of national and regional question, can and often becomes the issue prone to manipulation. The attempts to define national and regional identity by means of cultural legacy have been accompanying the research into art and also the creation of modern architecture in the spirit of national Historicism already since the 19th century. The place where the phenomena can be observed in a particularly acute way is Gdansk, a city of extremely complicated identity, multicultural structure, and a rich architectural output, the latter having been on a number of occasions a subject to national interpretations or over-interpretations.¹

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Gdansk architecture as seen in the perspective of research into the architecture of Gdansk. Let me discuss in detail the German and Polish state of we want it or not, with various influences result­

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Anyone at least rudimentarily familiar with the facts from the Polish-German relations finds it absolutely obvious that the artistic legacy of Gdansk was bound to turn to be almost from the very beginning of the research into it a sphere of controversy and extremely differentiated interpreta­
tions between the Polish and German art historians. For the German scholars Gdansk architecture constituted an integral part of the German cultural legacy, yet the Poles regarded the buildings from the period when the city belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as a part of their own tradition, interwoven, whether we want it or not, with various influences result­ing from a peculiar character of a multi-denomi­
national, multi-lingual, and multi-cultural state.

The present is not an appropriate opportunity to discuss in detail the German and Polish state of research into the architecture of Gdansk. Let me remind, however, that the German research into Gdansk architecture as seen in the perspective of German art was started really early. The best accomplished Gdansk buildings could be found already among the prints of Georg Möller’s portfolio published in 1821, whereas the publications from the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s, mainly by Wil­helm Lübke, consolidated in the general German awareness the image of Gdansk architecture of the Renaissance as one of the better examples of German architecture.

Views of Polish scholars on the architecture of Gdansk (I do not deal here with some detailed topographic studies) began to appear at the beginning of the 20th century. The researchers traced in it first of all Netherlandish and Italian influences, at times literally denying any connection that it may have had with German art. It is enough to mention in this respect controversies regarding the terminology with reference to the architecture of the 16th and 17th centuries. The Germans defined those buildings as raised in the style of German Renaissance and Baroque. The Poles, in turn, preferred the term Northern Ren­

aissance and Mannerism, eagerly emphasizing the main feature of this architecture, namely its relations with Netherlandish architecture, sometimes even excessively promoting the concept of Netherlandism in the context of Gdansk.

The 18th century brought no essential alter­
tions in Gdansk’s townscape. After 1793, Gdansk was encompassed within the boundaries of Prussia, whereas during the Napoleonic wars it suffered enormous devastation, losing for some decades to come almost completely any eco­
nomic importance, at the same time starting the period of stagnation which also affected the creation of new buildings. It was only once a new West Prussian Province had been formed post 1873, namely after the establishment of the Ger­

man Empire, when Gdansk was elevated to the status of the capital of the province, that a new momentum in the development of the city was gained, the economic growth accelerated, and a stimulus formed for the expansion of the city and enriching it with new public buildings. Histori­
cism of the second half of the 19th century determined the choice of a style from the past for them. The decision was made to follow the German Neo-Renaissance, already popular in the architecture of many German towns.

In 1830-1837, several projects were imple­
mented in Gdansk, these being first and fore...
most the buildings of the Supra-Presidency and Western Prussian Public Notary (Oberpräsidial- und Regierungsgebäude, Fig. 1) designed by the Berlin architect Karl Friedrich Endell and of the Governance of the Western Prussia Provinces (Landeshaus, Fig. 2) designed by the Berlin architectural company Ende & Böckmann. Around the same time the latter also raised two other important edifices in Gdansk: the Great Synagogue and the building of the Saving Bank (Sparkasse). In professional media in which all the designs were published it was emphasized that the buildings stylistically adhered to German Neo-Renaissance; additionally, on a specified wish of the then city’s Oberbürgermeister Leopold von Winter, as is testified by source texts, a clear reference to the local architectural legacy was enhanced.³

In view of the research into the architecture of German Neo-Renaissance, which points to its strong national and bourgeois connotations, as well as its relations with the myth of the Hanseatic League,⁴ the choice of this very style for the new architecture of Gdansk – the capital of an Empire’s province may be considered most just from the point of view of the city authorities’ political ambitions, which was later testified by Gdansk’s career. It allowed to enhance the fact that Gdansk belonged to the Empire, and at the same time signalled its local distinctness, it made reference to the bourgeois tradition of the town and referred directly to the times of the former grandeur of the city whose restoration was the dream of its inhabitants.

The second stage of the extension of Gdansk took place in the years 1895–1910, after the modern city fortifications had been pulled down. German Neo-Renaissance was already by that
time an officially acknowledged, though not the only national style of the Empire, and it almost fully dominated the style of buildings raised in the town at the time. In this context it seems that the most interesting is the episode related to the construction of the Technical University (Technische Hochschule Danzig) complex. The decision to select German Neo-Renaissance as the style for all the complex buildings was made in Berlin; it was also in Berlin that the ministry of public works designed the first complex, with Hermann Eggert initially working on it, to be followed by Georg Thür (Fig. 3). Already in the first publications written among the Berlin circle on the planned university it was said that "in the architectural forms a reference to the sphere of

Fig. 3. Gdańsk, Technical University (Technische Hochschule Danzig), project of Hermann Eggert and Georg Thür, 1898, repr.: Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung, 1899, p. 551.

Fig. 4. Gdańsk, Technical University (Technische Hochschule Danzig), Albert Carsten, 1900–1904, repr.: Technische Hochschule in Danzig. Festschrift zur Eröffnung 6 Oktober 1906, Danzig 1904, after p. 8.

Fig. 5. Gdańsk, Edifice of the Insurance (Landesversicherungsanstalt), Curt Hempel, 1903–1905, repr.: Danzig und seine Bauten, Danzig 1908, p. 141.
Fig. 6. Gdańsk, City Court (Land- und Amtsgerichtsgebäude), arch. Saal, 1910, Zeitschrift für Bauwesen, 1913, p. 209-210.

Fig. 7. Okocim, exhibition pavilion of the Okocim Brewery, 1894, Tomasz Pryliński, repr.: Wystawa Powszechna Krajobrazu 1894 r. i siły produkcyjne w kraju, Lwów 1897, vol. 1, nr 1, p. 158.

Fig. 8a. Gdańsk, Schlüter House in Jopengasse (today Piwna Street), before restoration, repr.: Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung, 1913, p. 236.

Fig. 8b. Gdańsk, Schlüter House in Jopengasse (today Piwna Street), after restoration of Carl Anton Meckel, 1911-1913, repr.: Zentralblatt der Bauverwaltung, 1913, p. 236.
Danzig’s old Renaissance buildings should be sought. In 1899, the designs were given a positive opinion by the Akademie der Bauwesen, yet on the Emperor’s order: “auf Allerhöchste Anordnung”, the initially designed forms apparently referring to Dutch Renaissance were replaced by “Alt-Danziger Bauweise” forms, closer in character. The final implementation designs authored by Albert Carsten were, in fact, enriched with a much greater number of gables than Eggert and Thür had assumed.

In the last years of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century some dozen Neo-Renaissance public buildings were raised in Gdansk, this including the police headquarters, the edifice of the Insurance (Landesversicherungsanstalt, Fig. 5), the Reich’s Bank, the Town Archives and the Court (Land- und Amtsgerichtsgebäude, Fig. 6), as well as an impressive Railway Station, with a tower quoting almost literary the tower of the Town Hall. What is more, the success of the style spread over to tenement houses and villas, hotels, department stores, bank headquarters, and many others. In major public buildings only some few cases of references to a different style can be observed, each time this style being Neo-Gothic with additional clear reference to Gdansk buildings.

The new architecture of Gdansk in 1880–1910 was equally German and Gdansk in its stylistics, it allowed for both national and local identification, which was clearly read by the then German inhabitants of the city. This did not, however, remain equally obvious for the Poles as much as the local identification was clear also for them, the relations with the national German style were no longer so. This is testified not only by the writings of the period, starting from the reports on the expeditions of Polish architects to Gdansk, to the guide texts on the other extreme, but also the episodic as it might be, but meaningful at the same time use of the “Old...
Gdansk style in the exhibition pavilion of the Okocim Brewery built in Lvov by the Cracow architect Tomas Pryliński in 1894 (Fig. 7). The use of the “Old Gdansk forms” was in the eyes of the commissioning entity meant to emphasize the long tradition of beer brewing in Okocim, as a matter of fact located in the south of Poland, in the then Galicia.14

The dominance of German Neo-Gothic in Gdansk architecture was in a way consolidated by establishing a strong centre of research into the old architecture of the city which was created at the Architecture Department at Gdansk Technical University in 1904. The architects who formed it became a conservative opposition versus any attempts to build differently, in a more modern manner, in compliance with German and European Avant-garde trends in architecture, while promoting conservative solutions. Meanwhile, the Gdansk milieu willingly accepted the influence of Heimatschutzbewegung, which was soon to be seen in the architecture of villa quarters, first of all in Langfuhr and the estates in the style of “garden-cities”, such as e.g. the complex of a clerks’ cooperative in Neuschottland.

The focus on the past and the values of old architecture yielded even before the outbreak of World War I the first attempts to restore the original homogeneous character to the old quarter of the city. In practice, this meant the rejection of the buildings from the first half of the 19th century, yet at the same time the first voices of criticism of late Historicism could be heard. In 1910, on the initiative of the private real-estate’s owners a competition was held to alter two houses adjacent to the Baroque so-called Schlüter
House in Jopengasse (today's Piwna Street). The winning design was authored by Carl Anton Meckel and it assumed the stylistic adjustment of the buildings to be altered both to the above-mentioned houses and buildings along the whole street. In effect, a pastiche on Baroque architecture was achieved: formally, very close to the Schlüter House, yet featuring shapes that those houses most probably had never had (Fig. 8a-b).

In the interwar-period, during the existence of the Free City of Danzig, architects affiliated with the Architecture Department of the Technical University continued to have a decisive voice on the shape of Gdańsk architecture. They effectively hampered any attempts to raise any avant-garde designs in the historical city centre, which Martin Kiessling, holding the office of Gdańsk's city architect in 1927-1929 verified personally (Fig. 9). He had succeeded to have two schools raised according to his designs in some other districts of Gdańsk, yet the idea to introduce any modern urban solutions in the strict centre of the city was strongly criticised, mainly by Otto Kloeppel and these projects, in fact, remained unaccomplished.15

After the National Socialist Party had won power in 1933, in Gdańsk a broad campaign to restore the monumental centre of the city was started. Within 6 years a great effort was put to restore the old aspect to the city by removing shop windows pierced at the turn of the 19th century, by reducing the number of aggressive advertising, but first of all by altering houses that "did not match" the historical architecture in the spirit of the architecture of the old Gdańsk.16 It was first of all buildings from the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century that fell victim to those alterations, for their Neo-Renaissance forms characteristic of late Historicism not longer matched the concept of the true Old Gdańsk architecture of the generation deciding on the new shape of the centre of Gdańsk in the 1930s. The accomplished result proved to create a very homogeneous whole, specially as any remains reminding of the fact that the city had once belonged to Poland and which had survived the Prussian times were as a matter of fact eliminated (Fig. 10).

The year 1945 resulted in an almost complete annihilation of the historical centre of Gdańsk, whereas in the aftermath of the decision of the great powers the city was to be on the territory of the Polish People's Republic. Its former inhabitants who had not managed to evacuate before the war front arrived, were displaced, their homes to be populated by the Poles, mainly coming from the eastern territories of Poland incorporated into the Soviet Union. A new stage in the history of the city started in which political and social needs related mainly to the need to tame space and gain new identification motivated the decision to rebuild the destroyed city.
centre. The works that had survived from the times of Prussia where then cursed and only those edifices which for utilitarian reasons could be used without any greater financial input survived. Instead, the old architecture from the times of the Polish–Lithuania Commonwealth was worth restoring, mainly due to the fact that in the course of the debate the opinion on its Polishness prevailed. In the course of the reconstruction all the city “icons” were faithfully restored: the City Gates, churches, Town Halls, Artus Court, and the Court of St. George, yet the residential architecture was rebuilt in order to satisfy the needs of an already new working estate, hiding behind the “Gdansk” gabled narrow facades ordinary apartment blocks grouped around internal courtyards, once very densely built up. On the very occasion an attempt to “Polonize” or rather “de-Germanize” the reconstructed buildings was made to consciously manipulate iconographic motifs of the facade decoration, specially along the stately route along Długa and Dlugi Targ Streets. The complex of the reconstructed old centre of the city was to become the symbol of Poland’s eternal presence on the Baltic.

An amazing newest chapter in the history of the reception of Gdansk architecture and searching for the places of local identification began in the 1990s. Apparently, among the circles of quite an influential group of Gdansk intellectuals a concept was born to reconstruct the works of Neo-Renaissance architecture from the Wilhelm times, as the latter was regarded to be an excellent example of the Gdansk genius loci and a signpost for modern architects searching for a new expression for Gdansk architecture. Paradoxically, in the eyes of some contemporary Gdansk residents the German architecture, the Gründerzeit, turned out to be an attractive alternative to some contemporary designs. The result of a such-conceived policy of cherishing the local genius loci and revealed in the brick-stone elevations, volute gables, bay windows and Renaissance turetts, can be seen, e.g. in the buildings raised in the 1990s along the southern street front of Stagiewna Street (former Milchkannengasse), where in synthetic plasters the facades of houses from the times of the Gründerzeit were recreated not extremely faithfully. The seducing picturesque quality of those buildings effectively overcomes in many Polish beholders historical, and until recently negative, connotations. Paradoxically, this possibility of local identification with the architecture of the German times turned out to be so attractive, as it provides an opportunity to create yet another Gdansk myth on the city’s tolerance, openness, multiethnic character, meaning features desirable for the united Europe of the 21st century.

Actually, the analysing of Gdansk architectural legacy in the national categories of the Polish or German qualities has created a number of myths, fabricating this or that myth for the purpose of current political needs. Over the last two centuries authors writing about Gdansk architecture have developed a whole range of strategies of appropriation supported by a strong awareness of a multi-century-lasting Polish–German national conflict. And the easiest way out always turned out to be the reference to the local dimension of things, the mythology of an always free and independent Gdansk, overwhelmed by that genius loci which allowed it to maintain cultural continuity despite a complicated political history.

The Renaissance architecture of Gdansk, interpreted by scholars, architects, and the 19th-century Prussian residents of Gdansk served as grounds for creating the architecture of Historicism in its national style, yet of local connotation, which apparently 100 years later has been regarded by the Poles living in the city as a manifestation of the genius loci and has been raised to the status of a two-aspect model: of local identification and an over-national tolerance at the same time.

NOTES

1 Let me just remind you the very basic historical facts which have given the shape to the city. The settlement recorded for the first time in 997 developed as the capital of a Slav Pomeranian Duchy, and around mid-13th century it was given town privileges. Captured by the Teutonic Order in 1308, in 1361 Gdansk was incorporated into the activity of the Hanseatic League. In 1466, after the 13-years’ War Gdansk separated from the Teutonic state and incorporated into the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth gaining, however, an exceptional and very privileged position. After the second 1793
partition of Poland, Gdańsk was incorporated into Prussia, and in 1920 in compliance with the Versailles Treaty it gained the status of a Free City under the protectorate of the League of Nations.

I do not mention here earlier publications of topographic-descriptive character prepared mainly among the Gdańsk circle.

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Lübbe, Wilhelm, Geschichte der deutschen Renaissance (Geschichter der Baukunst, Bd. 5), Stuttgart 1873.

Kruszyński, Tadeusz: Story Gdańsk i historia jego sztuki (The Old Gdańsk and the History of its Art), Wieliczka 1913.


