Patterns of Polish Identity Building:
Urban Regeneration and Placemaking
in Post-World War II Gdańsk

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ABSTRACT

Urban Regeneration and Placemaking are complex processes occurring in spaces continuously. Though highly spatial, these practices always have an overwhelming effect on the identity of place, affecting perception of a city or region from the perspective of both insiders and outsiders. Gdańsk, a Polish port city situated on the coast of the Baltic Sea, developed a strong, unique identity following World War II. In the wake of the conflict, Gdańsk (known as Danzig until the end of the war) was forced to contend with a near-total physical destruction as well as a complete population transfer. Following the trend of German expulsions after the Potsdam Conference in 1945, Gdańsk lost nearly all of its ethnically German population and gained Poles from Central Poland and the East from the Kresy Borderlands. Against the backdrop of the war, I find that the processes of identity building and placemaking in Gdańsk are highly informed by Poland's greater push toward tendencies of nationalization throughout its new borders, a trend referred to by researchers as Polonization. Utilizing both secondary textual analysis and archival research, I find that the practices of identity building, placemaking, and urban regeneration are seen through the redrawing of Poland's borders after the war, greatly informing who stayed in Gdańsk and who was expelled; the shift in Gdańsk's cartographic representation between German and Polish mapmakers; and the modern-day effect on Gdańsk's demographics and urban sprawl resulting from years of deindustrialization and suburbanization.

Keywords: urban regeneration, placemaking, place promotion, identity, Gdańsk, Poland, World War II, migration

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One Introduction 1

Chapter Two Why Gdańsk? 4

Historical Context 4

Urban Regeneration and Placemaking 8

Place Promotion 11

Economic Shift 13

Chapter Three Methods 16

Chapter Four Results and Discussion 18

Borders, Migration, and Demographics: A Poland for Poles 21

Maps/Photos: Visualizations of Gdańsk Over the Years 27

Current Demographics and Research 34

Chapter Five Conclusions and Recommendations 37

List of References 40

Vita 45

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 - “Discover Gdańsk”: Kilarski & Zieliński, 1949, Plany Gdańska 7

Figure 2 - Map featured in guide of Gdańsk, 1948, Plany Gdańska 19

Figure 3 - Front gates of Gdańsk Harbor, Plany Gdańska 20

Figure 4 - Map of Europe prior to and during World War I (1914 - 1918), created by author using Historical Map Chart 23

Figure 5 - Map of Europe during the interwar period (1918-1939), created by author using Historical Map Chart 24

Figure 6 – Gdańsk (Danzig) situated alongside various politically and culturally relevant cities to the German Reich, 1928, Plany Gdańska 28

Figure 7 - Timeline of Gdańsk’s (Danzig) expanding borders showcasing German influence, 1898, Plany Gdańska 29

Figure 8 - Map included in Poznaj Gdańsk by Kilarski and Zieliński, 1949, Plany Gdańska 30

Figure 9 - Map included in Poznaj Gdańsk by Kilarski and Zieliński, 1949, Plany Gdańska 31

Figure 10 - Gdańsk zabytkowy, highlights architectural styles and buildings/blocks preserved and not preserved from warfare, 1959, Plany Gdańska 33

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Gdańsk, Poland, located in the country's northern Baltic coast, is a city with a profoundly significant culture and history. Shaped by centuries of geopolitical turbulence, its history is a prime example of the complex dynamics of territorial change, identity, and cultural transformation. In the aftermath of World War II, Gdańsk found itself at the center of a monumental demographic and spatial reconfiguration. The expulsion of the city's German population amongst the background of German removal to German territories alongside the subsequent repopulation by Poles displaced by the shifting borders of the post-war settlement created a social and cultural void on top of the need for rapid urban regeneration and placemaking (La Lumia & Nachum, 2025). This period of intense change marks a precarious stage in the city's urban history as the need for physical reconstruction was met with the challenge of creating a new collective identity for a city that had been, in many ways, severed from its historical roots.

In this context, urban regeneration extends well beyond the reconstruction of the city of Gdańsk's physical structures. Regeneration became a process of redefining the city's cultural and social landscape. In many ways, the urban renewal of Gdańsk formed the city's modern authenticity marked by both an understanding and a dismissal of parts of its (Lorens and Mironowicz, 2008). The rebuilding of the city therefore was centered around more than just clearing and rebuilding its war-torn infrastructure. At the forefront of the regeneration of Gdańsk sat the process of establishing a sense of continuity and belonging for the new Polish inhabitants, many of whom were unfamiliar with the city's

historical and cultural heritage (Tölle, 2008). This process of placemaking, in which the physical space of the city was reimagined to reflect the new social order, became a crucial mechanism for re-establishing Gdańsk's identity and its connection to Polishness.

This thesis explores the urban regeneration efforts and placemaking strategies employed in Gdańsk following WWII with a specific focus on how the expulsion of Germans and the repopulation of Poles influenced the city's redevelopment as a major trading port and cultural landmark of Poland. It analyzes the relationship between urban planning, the physical rebuilding, and the social and cultural dynamics of a population that faced the dual challenges of displacement and rebuilding. This research also examines how these processes contributed to the formation of new cultural identities, the role of memory in shaping urban spaces, and how Gdańsk's regeneration efforts offer insights into broader themes of urban transformation following conflict.

By focusing on this pivotal moment in Gdańsk's history, I contribute to the wider field of urban/economic geography with a particular emphasis on understanding the ways in which cities negotiate identity and placemaking in the wake of war/conflict and mass displacement. By detailing Gdańsk's urban regeneration and placemaking strategies, this research provides a deeper understanding of how cities can rebuild their physical infrastructure and transform their distinct social and cultural makeup in the face of such a profound demographic change. The question addressed in my current research includes: How did urban regeneration practices and placemaking efforts in Gdańsk, following the resettlement of its German population and the influx of Polish settlers after World War II,

occur? More specifically, this research attempts to connect urban regeneration and placemaking strategies with the construction of Gdańsk's unique identity.

CHAPTER TWO

WHY GDAŃSK?

Historical Context

German historian Peter Oliver Loew, in his book *Gdańsk: Portrait of a City* that details the volatile history of the city, remarks that "Gdańsk's history is so rich and has been rewritten so often and with such contradictory interpretations that one might at times be left with the impression of numerous different cities with nothing in common beyond their name" (p. 184). Aided by the various occupations, titles, and political distinctions, this assertion is nothing less than true. Prior to the Second World War, Gdańsk had taken several names: Gyddanyzc, Kdanze, Danzk, Danczik, and Danzig (Loew & Wood, 2024).

Originally settled by Slavic settlers some 200 years before its first mention (as Urbs Gyddanyzc), Gdańsk quickly became an advantageous settlement, particularly amongst the cities in the Hanseatic League, due to its location at the confluence of Vistula and Motława rivers (Tölle, 2008). This strategic trading location resulted in German occupation of the region by the end of the twelfth century. This German commune mainly traded and distributed textiles and the city, at the time consisting only of the Old Town and its surrounding fortress of timber, became an autonomous region for the first time (Śliwiński & Możejko, 2020). At the turn of the 14th century came the rule of the Teutonic Order in Gdańsk, marked by the Gdańsk Bloodbath of 1308 which left most of the city's inhabitants dead (Loew & Wood, 2024). In the aftermath of the Teutonic Knights' bloody entrance, the Order soon recognized the massive economic

gain that would arise by the reconstruction of the city. The proximity to the Vistula estuary on the Baltic sea gave the Order the potential to control trade in the area and the city's geography allowed for the proliferation of productive industrial output (Loew & Wood, 2024).

In 1454, Gdańsk once again changed hands following the outbreak of the Thirteen Years War between the Polish Crown and the Teutonic Order (Śliwiński & Możejko, 2017). In the two centuries under control of the Kingdom of Poland (recognized as the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth midway through the 16th century) the city realized massive economic gains and amassed nearly double the population from its years under Teutonic Rule (Tölle, 2008). Some of the economic incentives under the rule of the Polish crown included a guarantee of no city being built within a 5 mile radius of Gdańsk, a mint "complete with all its revenues", and control of the city's port free from arbitrary customs regulations (Śliwiński & Możejko, 2017, p. 36). This period of economic and political prosperity would continue until the Prussian takeover in the city in the 18th century. This takeover would prove to be the most significant in terms of the long lasting effects on the city as well as the political boundaries – or lack thereof – of properly defined Polish borders. The 3rd Partition of Poland in 1795 fundamentally erased the continent's map *politically* until the end of World War I over 120 years later. Split between the influence of the Russian, German (Prussian), and Habsburg Empires, Poland experienced emigration from throughout these lands, once again adding to the influx of German influence on Gdańsk's demographics and society (Żurawski vel Grajewski, 2015).

In 1793, “a long chapter of [Gdańsk] history ended” (Loew & Wood, 2024, p. 114). Under the authority of Prussia, Gdańsk all but lost its historically autonomous rule, marked by a restructuring of local politics directly adhered to the policy of the War and Domains Chamber. Amidst the crisis of political identity of Gdańsk, economic sustainability of the city was literally drying up – the Vistula River’s lowering water levels and poor maintenance of the inner-city river way made it difficult for ever growing trading ships to make way into the city. However, the city pivoted to rail transportation that moved goods, principally wood and grain, into Gdańsk, which led to economic growth between the years 1871 and 1913 (Loew & Wood, 2024).

While the city of Gdańsk did not play a major role during the First World War, its prominence as a “free city” and the establishment of the Polish Corridor following the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 changed the outlook of the city’s history drastically. No longer under German control, Gdańsk was declared a free city under semi-autonomous control under the League of Nation and Poland itself now had direct access to the Baltic Sea, rendering East Prussia annexed from the rest of the German Empire (Pease 1982; Tölle, 2008). The contention between the new borders drawn by the Treaty of Versailles via the Polish Corridor, particularly Germany’s disrupted access to East Prussia as a result of its new eastern border caused much dispute in the interwar period (Pease, 1982). Gdańsk’s distinction of “free city” free from direct control by Germany or Poland also was a source of aggression from Germany’s viewpoint. Germany felt as if Gdańsk, with its cultural and historical ties and population of 90% ethnic Germans, rightfully belonged

to the Reich, and occupied the city in September of 1939 (Loew & Wood, 2024; Pease, 1982).



Figure 1 - “Discover Gdańsk”: Kilarski & Zieliński, 1949, Plany Gdańska

Urban Regeneration and Placemaking

Ujang and Zakariya (2015) assert that "urban regeneration involves the process of remaking places" (p. 711). Following the Second World War, perhaps the most insurmountable task Gdańsk faced was remaking a city for Gdańsczians – a Polish city for Poles. Due in part by the near total destruction of the city, Gdańsk not only faced the harsh reality of physical reconstruction, but also had to concentrate efforts on rebuilding an identity. Identity in this sense is reflected by the political, economic, and social structures of the city. After the First World War and the reestablishment of the Polish state, the city of Gdańsk, with help from the newly established Polish Corridor, was separated from the strains of the German Empire and, for the second time in its history, gained the title of "free city" (Tölle, 2008).

The distinction of a semi-autonomous city-state, while not unique to Gdańsk, presented the city with an interesting outlook following such a devastating conflict. While the Polish state had been reestablished, and Gdańsk no longer under the control of Germany, the city sat somewhere in the middle of the two European powers. While under the protection and supervision of the League of Nations following World War I, Gdańsk was initially utilized as a trading port for the newly formed Polish Republic (Tölle, 2008). However, after this relationship soured, Gdańsk took a major economic hit as the newly built city of Gdynia, some thirty miles north of the city, became Poland's access to the Baltic Sea.

Following the Second World War, however, Gdańsk faced a much greater task than pseudo-national competition – the city, rebuilt *physically* as similar as possible to its

pre-war form, had to create, or make place, for displaced Poles that were mostly comprised of those displaced from Eastern Poland annexed by the Soviet Union (Tölle, 2008). Lorens and Mironowicz (2020) assert that this process was highly political – deep discussions took place whether or not to rebuild the city in a manner that highlighted its German and Prussian past. However, the decision was made to essentially rebuild the city with a focus on the past that respected the present, particularly with an emphasis on the urban models of the time. This resulted in a diverse, sporadic social mix in the city center that housed not only laborers but also artists, politicians, and many others that would now fall under the category of the creative class (Lorens and Mironowicz, 2008).

The discussions regarding the rebuilding of the city, while political, indeed show a clear example of the complexities of urban planning, particularly with respect to regeneration and renewal. These ideas are "unmistakenly tied to political power and elite notions of development" (Sagan and Grabkowska, 2012, p. 2). However, a misjudgment of the city's reconstruction ran the risk of alienation of the local community – now comprised mainly of formerly displaced Poles – and the potential for nothing short of catastrophic failure in context to social regeneration efforts. Essentially, the decisions made in renewing the city following the war had to find a fitting balance of political and social justifications with a strong emphasis on urban planning to appease the newly Polish population. However, prior to the fall of communism in 1989 and the rise of decentralization efforts, Poland lacked the strong local government structure that could've elicited the type of feedback from those most impacted by Gdańsk post-war period of urban renewal (Levitas, 2017).

In researching and studying practices of urban regeneration, one must establish a catalyst as to why and how a city, its people, or a country builds a place. In the case of Gdańsk after the Second World War, there are various facets that can be understood as its catalyst of remaking place. Namely, the desire for the newly defined Polish state to create an ethnically homogenous state sparked efforts in Gdańsk to make place for Poles (Bykowska, 2019). Polonization efforts, therefore, began with the "removal of all Germans demonstrating German nationality" (Bykowska, 2019, p. 139). Yet, while these early post-war actions established the demographic and political conditions for a Gdańsk built for Poland, they did not themselves constitute placemaking in a meaningful sense. Rather, they formed the precondition for a more complex and contested process through which the new residents of Gdańsk had to negotiate belonging and spatial identity. In this context we can begin to unearth the urban regeneration processes in Gdańsk that can be understood as a deliberate act of state-led placemaking efforts.

There is not any particular model to predict, prescribe, or define urban regeneration patterns. Robert & Sykes (1999) assert that urban regeneration consists of the interplay of variables across space. It is the historical contexts, economic circumstances, and social makeup that drive urban regeneration across various settings. Similarly, placemaking is fundamentally tied to the people that inhabit space. Courage et al. suggests that placemaking, in our current understanding of the topic, is so vague and varied that one wonders whether placemaking "is a thing at all" (2021, p. 2). However, what we can take from the term is the idea that each space – a city, a county, a nation – must derive its place from its people. In other words, the architecture, the city structure,

and the visuality of place is first and foremost a reflection of the people that inhabit a space. This is the key variable in Gdańsk's history that I seek to understand through my research.

Place Promotion

Urban geographers have described a certain pattern of behaviors of competitive cities, particularly in more recent years, that they have termed *place promotion*. While scholars have debated the specifics of the term, and more specifically its empirical value in urban geographical studies, it is a useful lens when viewing the post-war period of Polish cities such as Gdańsk. At its core, place promotion occurs when city governments formulate a particular image in which to 'sell' to outsiders (Young & Lever, 1996). Furthermore, as Boisen et. al (2017) note, the distinction of place promotion into terms such as place marketing and place branding narrow the scope of the theory, allowing for deeper analysis of developed cities in their attempt to enhance competitiveness in the age of neoliberalism.

In context to Gdańsk, the most useful term to ascribe to the city's post-war development is *place branding*. Boisen et. al (2017) describe place branding as an "identity-driven" approach that "seeks to express selected values and narratives of the place in question" (p. 7). In other words, these cities manage their reputation from the *inside out* in order to draw interest from *outside*. Jan Nijman's (1999) work on the reconstruction of Amsterdam speaks to how this research can inform identity-building practices in order to establish a 'brand' or a certain 'association' with place. In this article, Nijman argues that the reputation of Amsterdam as the "liberal" world city has

been shaped by increasing globalization that often over-exaggerates or enhances the literal characteristics of the city itself. He notes that the draw to the city, enhanced by mass tourism, does not inherently "erase local culture, but it does undermine their original form" (p. 161). Therefore, place promotion, and more specifically place building, is best understood and studied within the context of the city's intention rather than its global image. The *intent*, as opposed to solely the *effect*, of Gdańsk's post-war reconstruction is the specific phenomenon that this research seeks to build off of.

A distinction between the terms *place branding* and *place marketing* is crucial to understanding the physical processes that occur in a city to maximize its competitiveness. Viewing one process as an instrument of the other is perhaps the most meaningful way to determine the efficacy of each (Boisen et. al, 2017; Mabillard et. al, 2023). Essentially, place branding occurs when a city adopts practices to establish their image from the inside-out. In the case of place marketing, the image is developed from an outside-in approach, such as understood through Nijman's thesis on Amsterdam (Mabillard et. al, 2023). Furthermore, Mabillard et. al (2023) theorize that place branding need not be a "prerequisite" for place marketing (p. 72). Any city, regardless of the perceived 'image' or 'brand', commits to marketing their place for competitiveness. In contrast, war torn cities and places of conflict such as Gdańsk certainly exhibit a sense of branding, particularly due to its historic Prussian roots, but lack a clear path to place marketing as a result of warfare and an unclear role of government. Following expulsion of the German residents of Gdańsk, the question of how the city's image would be rebuilt by the "brand ambassadors," its new Polish citizens, was also confounding. Reforming the city's

population became as important of an initiative as rebuilding the war-torn city. Research shows that a positive social connection to one's own place leads to community involvement in place promotion, so the internal image and brand of Gdańsk became vitally important in the post-war period (Vollero et al., 2018). Therefore, this research will seek to identity the methods, actions, and legacy of place branding in Gdańsk that have shaped its role as a Polish city.

Economic Shift

The near-total destruction of the city after World War II resulted essentially in a halt of economic functionality. Trade was disrupted, leading to collapse of various industries notably traded through Gdańsk prior to the war including the energy sector (coal and petroleum), timber/forestry, and production and procurement of foodstuffs (Van Cleef, 1933). Therefore, efforts to restore the city as a major trading port in the Baltic Sea resulted in the restructuring of economic development around the city Gdańsk.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, this restructuring unfolded within the broader context of the newly socialist Polish state, which rapidly nationalized Gdańsk's industrial assets and reorganized the port economy under centrally planned directives. This was the result of the Red Army's "kommandaturas" that first ran the regained territories in Poland following the war who were in charge of "normalizing the economic situation and ethnic policy" (Bykowska, 2019). The Polish Workers' Party immediately set upon establishing a safety net that had been greatly disrupted due to the war, namely revitalizing the cities infrastructure and feeding the inhabitants of the city (Loew & Wood, 2024). Advancements were to be made to infrastructure during the

revitalization of the city such as commuter rail and expanded bus routes, and due to the massive spike in population, housing projects were quickly undertaken (Loew & Wood, 2024).

Historically, Gdańsk greatly relied on its strategic trading port. This reliance on sea trade continued for some time after the war, but Poles quickly lost interest in shipping and trading companies due to the nationalization of trade in 1948 (Loew & Wood, 2024). In the emerging socialist state, this restructuring was driven largely by central planning rather than by and for local priorities. Industrial assets were nationalized and investment was concentrated in port operations and heavy industry (mainly shipbuilding and chemical/food processing plants) soon became the city's dominant sector (Tölle, 2008). While this supported the physical reconstruction of the city, it also tied Gdańsk to a narrow, state-directed economic model that shaped the spatial layout and social composition of the city (Lorens & Mironowicz, 2020).

By the late socialist period, inefficiencies within Gdańsk's economic model became structurally vulnerable. By 1988, strikes became prevalent throughout Poland and eventually reached Gdańsk Shipyard (known then as Lenin Shipyard). Lech Wałęsa – a shipyard worker, trade union leader, and eventually the first democratically elected president of Poland in 1990 – led strikes for Lenin Shipyard workers, eventually resulting in a roundtable discussion with politicians in Warsaw that reflected the "erosion" of Poland's political and economic system (Loew & Wood, 2024). These pressures contributed to social unrest in Gdańsk and ultimately intersected with wider national

reforms leading up to the end of communist rule in Poland in 1989 (Sagan & Grabkowska, 2012).

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

To complete this research, I employ a qualitative, historical geographical methodology designed to examine the relationship between post-World War II urban regeneration, placemaking, and identity reconstruction in Gdańsk. As my research seeks to understand the political and demographic forces that shaped the rebuilding of the city, my analysis relied primarily on textual and visual sources that document both the physical reconstruction of Gdańsk and the narratives that the reconstruction resulted in. I conducted an extensive review of secondary literature including journal articles and historical studies that address Gdańsk's complex past, the processes of postwar reconstruction throughout Poland and Europe, and theoretical works discussing placemaking and urban regeneration. This extensive review served as both the conceptual foundation for the research as well as the lens through which I view and interpret the primary source materials. I place particular emphasis on literature and other sources that cover population displacement, the idea of nation building in Poland (as well as how it was framed in context to post Nazi occupation), and the politics of urban reconstruction in conflict ridden areas.

Important data relevant to my findings and conclusions originated from digitized archival collections such as the State Archives in Gdańsk, UN Archives, and *Plany Gdańska*. These archives included historical maps (produced both before and after the Second World War), layouts of city plans, census information for migration data, planning documents, policies, and photographs that were crucial to my research. These

materials offered insights into some of the possible intentions, conversations, and policy decisions that shaped Gdańsk rebuilding efforts as well as the visual record necessary to analyze how the urban landscape was physically altered and remade for the sake of the new Polish population. For the following sections, my findings and arguments laid out will be conclusions drawn from extensive textual analysis and evaluating planning documents found in *Plany Gdańska* and other archives. While much of my research utilizes secondary resources, opinions and conclusions drawn on my behalf are finalized following extensive analysis of textual sources and are substantiated by data found both in the literature review and research findings phase.

As this research focuses on a Polish city and many relevant archival materials exist primarily in Polish, I find it necessary to acknowledge the linguistic limitations inherent in this research. I do not speak or read Polish fluently, therefore, interpretations of documents written and published in Polish relied on a combination of English translations when available, secondary sources that discuss the sources in question, and, if absolutely necessary, online translation tools utilized solely for interpretation. Visual and spatial materials such as maps and photographs (and architectural plans if they become relevant to my research) are analyzed to the best of my ability independent of the language barrier which will allow for meaningful analysis without requiring full text translation. While this reliance on archival research with documents published in the Polish language presents an added challenge to my research methodology, the information available, in my opinion, remains sufficient for the scope of this thesis and will be used critically throughout the analysis of this research.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With the goal of determining the practices of urban regeneration and placemaking in Gdańsk in mind, an important dynamic between organic and manufactured identity emerges. Naturally, cities are manufactured to meet the demands of its people, its geography, and its standing in a global context. In this process, however, an identity is formed due to the unique characteristics and traits that are present in a given space. The answer in the debate between an organic or manufactured image or identity, therefore, becomes murky and is highly place-dependent.

In the case of Gdańsk, it is hard to argue against a truly manufactured process of rebuilding, regeneration, and renewal *directly* following the war. The near-total physical destruction of the city demanded a strong rebuilding presence in order to resuscitate the city's economic heartbeat (specifically the renovations of the Gdańsk harbor). However, and perhaps more importantly, the simultaneous, near-complete demographic change introduces a complication in the discussion of Gdańsk's *manufactured* image. One could argue that the deliberate removal of ethnic Germans from the region to allow space for Poles from the east to reinhabit the city following the Potsdam Conference in 1945, allowing the transfer of government power to shift hands to Poland, is evidence of a highly manufactured process of cultural purity in the region, and this argument would not be entirely incorrect. However, it is crucial to note that without the migration of Poles to Gdańsk from the east and the inevitable mark left on the city as a result of this decision, the city today as we know it, would simply not exist. As is evident from the findings in

this section, Poland looked toward the Gdańsk Harbor and Shipyard after the war as it symbolized both maritime independence and national identity. Therefore, the Polish government's role in regenerating the city of Gdańsk not only becomes clear through their economic dependence on the port, but also in utilizing the city as a "model" of sorts for the newly-engineered ethnically homogenous state as a whole.



Figure 2 - Map featured in guide of Gdańsk, 1948, Plany Gdańska



Figure 3 - Front gates of Gdańsk Harbor, Plany Gdańska

The following chapter discusses the findings, based on analysis of migration patterns accompanied by primary and secondary resources centered on the study of Gdańsk's origins, regarding the birth of a "Gdańsk identity" in the wake of Poland's rebuilding phase post-World War II. It includes a section discussing the border politics and migration into Gdańsk following the war, a section taking a closer look at planning maps and photos that support the Polish identity engrained in the city, and concludes with a discussion of demographic statistics of modern day Gdańsk that gives us a clearer indication of how Gdańsk and its identity were shaped by the war and the ensuing migration following the restructuring of Eastern Europe.

Borders, Migration, and Demographics: A Poland for Poles

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, Europe's borders changed endlessly. History shows that these changing borders are in large part due to major streaks of conflict, ranging from the German Wars of Unification to the end and aftermath of World War II. Figures 4 and 5 show the shift in borders between World War I, after the 3rd Partition of Poland, and up to the beginning of World War II, respectively. Figure 4 represents the years between 1795-1914, whereas Figure 5 shows inter-war Europe between 1918-1939. While Poland existed during the years shown by Figure 4, its political borders were dominated by the German, Russian, and Habsburg Empires. Figure 5, therefore, shows the dissolution of these empires and firmly places Poland on the map for the first time since 1795. Notably, the "Free City of Danzig" is labeled to the east of the Polish Corridor, a stretch of formerly German lands separating the German Reich from East Prussia. This area, established by the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, became a point of contention for both Germans and Poles. Ethnic Germans living in and to the east (i.e. East Prussia) become politically and economically separated from Germany itself, and Poles lament the exclusion of Danzig from the new Polish borders due to its maritime and economic connection to the country (Hagen, 2009).

However, beyond the implications of peace treaties and territorial gains and losses, ties to nationalism drove much of the conversation and implementation of the new rigid state lines. This can most notably be seen in Eastern Europe with the Iron Curtain, a political tool of the east that separated culture, politics, and economics from western civilization until the fall of communism late in the 20th century, but nationalism,

particularly to the Poles, plays a major role in the dispersal of migrants in the aftermath of the Second World War (Knippenberg & Markusse, 1999).

If such a foundation exists for this particular line of questioning, specifically Polish historiography and the idea of Polish nationalism post-World War II, it would be found in Jan Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. In *Neighbors*, Gross details the massacre of the Jewish residents in Jedwabne, Poland by their Polish neighbors on July 10, 1941. As Gross states, "half the population of a small East European town [Jedwabne] murdered the other half – some 1,600 men, women, and children" (p. xviii). Moreover, Gross uses *Neighbors* as an introduction to the necessity for a fundamental upheaval of traditional Polish historiography. Gross seeks to challenge the conventionally held belief that "Polish Jewry has been bracketed by historians as a distinct, separate subject that only tangentially effects the rest of Polish society" (p. xviii). Demonstrations such as the Jedwabne massacre clearly make it impossible to assert that the histories of Polish Jewry and the rest of Polish society are disassociated. In *Neighbors,* Gross paints a larger picture than that of just the massacre in Jedwabne that disrupts the traditional narrative that Poland was simply a victim during the war and seeks to redefine the traditional approach to the historiographies of Poland during World War II.

While Gross's thesis applies specifically to the foundations of an identity of Polish nationalism statewide, these themes remain present in the history of Gdańsk's post-war reconstruction agenda, particularly as it relates to both out-migration of ethnic German and in-migration of Poles from the East. Roughly a third of the new residents of



Figure 4 - Map of Europe prior to and during World War I (1914 - 1918), created by author using Historical Map Chart



Figure 5 - Map of Europe during the interwar period (1918-1939), created by author using Historical Map Chart

Gdańsk came from the territories of Poland annexed by the Soviet Union during the Second World War. They often arrived under the misnomer of "repatriates" due to the fact that, while ethnically Polish, they had been denied proper citizenship due to their geographic location in the country due to annexation. Additionally, these migrants were completely unfamiliar with both the city of Gdańsk and the Pomeranian voivodeship, complicating their relationship with their new host city (Stola, 2023). The remaining two thirds of the new inhabitants, according to historian Peter Oliver Loew, largely relocated from the Central Polish cities of Łódź, Lublin, and Rzeszów. While some migrants often came and went looking for economic opportunities in the newly Polish city, many took up positions in relief efforts, as reinvigorating the city's infrastructure was of great importance, as well as industrial work and jobs in the harbor, which immediately following the war were centered on procuring foodstuffs sent from relief agencies (Loew & Wood, 2024).

One might find it ironic, perhaps even poetic, that these new residents of Gdańsk often share a troubled history in terms of acceptance by the state itself with their new city. From all accounts, the new citizens of Gdańsk from the Kresy Borderlands and Central Poland to the south were, despite all odds, well equipped with handling the uphill battle before them, particularly due to their laborious nature and educational status, aided by the "safety net" of Communist annexation in the East. This shared sense of "newness" in the eyes of the state, I argue, proved to be significantly beneficial in the regeneration of the new Polish city of Gdańsk. Paired with the rebuilding of the Gdańsk Shipyard, the new demographic of the city become major players in the building (or perhaps,

continuation) of a national symbol for the country. Later in Gdańsk's history, the labor situated around the harbor and shipyard becomes synonymous with the Solidarity movement led by Lech Wałęsa, indicating the importance of the shipyard itself to Poland as a national symbol.

Historically speaking, the process of Gdańsk's transformation as a site of Polish national identity following the war is a relatively natural one. For one, the state felt compelled to build the city with a strong Polish distinctiveness based on years of economic and cultural ties with the country in the city's rich history of contested leadership. There's no doubt that the Gdańsk Harbor and Shipyard play a major role in this transformation as the country relied heavily on the city's maritime trading connection. Additionally, the Battle of Westerplatte being situated in and around the Gdańsk harbor, marking the first shots of World War II, symbolized the plight of the Polish people and legitimizes the martyrdom of the Polish spirit present in the city. (Bykowska, 2019). Further, cultural attachment to the city's Polish heritage is further evidenced in the city leadership's treatment of ethnic Germans that remained after the expulsion. As these residents, formerly considered Danzigers, were as equally without a clear connection to a national identity as the Poles that migrated to Gdańsk, those who stayed had to prove their loyalty to the state and be vetted as a Pole or risk deportation or harsh discrimination. This included forced labor, robbery, violence, and in some cases, death (Loew & Wood, 2024). These factors combined begin to piece together the cultural and social processes that led to the Polonization of Gdańsk, shaping the identity of the city and placemaking practices that occur as a result of occupation and war.

Maps/Photos: Visualizations of Gdańsk Over the Years

Archival records relating to Gdańsk, the destruction of the city in World War II, and the process of urban regeneration following the war give us excellent insight into the practice of developing and sustaining the strong cultural identity that remains in the city to this day. *Plany Gdańska,* an online archive exhibit with a plethora of maps and planning documents, showcases a timeline of maps pertinent to the political, cultural, and urban shift following the change of hands between German and Polish influence in the city. While these maps display the general layout of the city throughout the decades pre- and post-conflict, their shift in tone, intent, and visualization methods symbolize a notable transition in the city's identity. German influenced maps, published prior to the end of 1944, typically are accompanied with captions that situate Gdańsk (written then as "Danzig") as a politically and culturally significant city to the German Reich. For example, Figure 6 displays a collection of maps including Gdańsk situated alongside cities such as Leipzig, Hannover, and Dresden as cities relevant to the Reich. Likewise, the maps prior to the transfer of power and population also exhibit a more practical or pragmatic tone, reflecting the identity of Danzig associated with the German influence on the city. While all maps fall under the political purview of their maker, the German-made maps are less focused on promoting Gdańsk as a standalone entity and more directed toward Gdańsk existing as a cog in the greater German machine. This is further evidenced Figure 7, a historical map showcasing the city's expanding borders as German influenced expanded in the region.

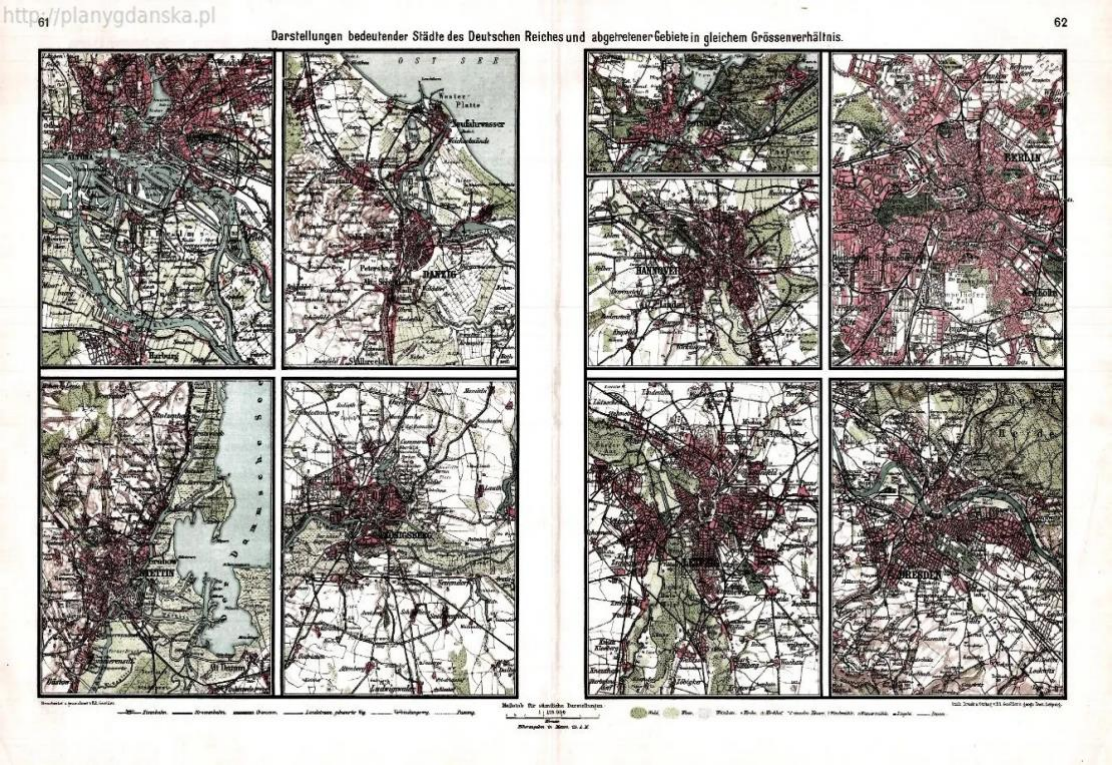


Figure 6 – Gdańsk (Danzig) situated alongside various politically and culturally relevant cities to the German Reich, 1928, Plany Gdańska

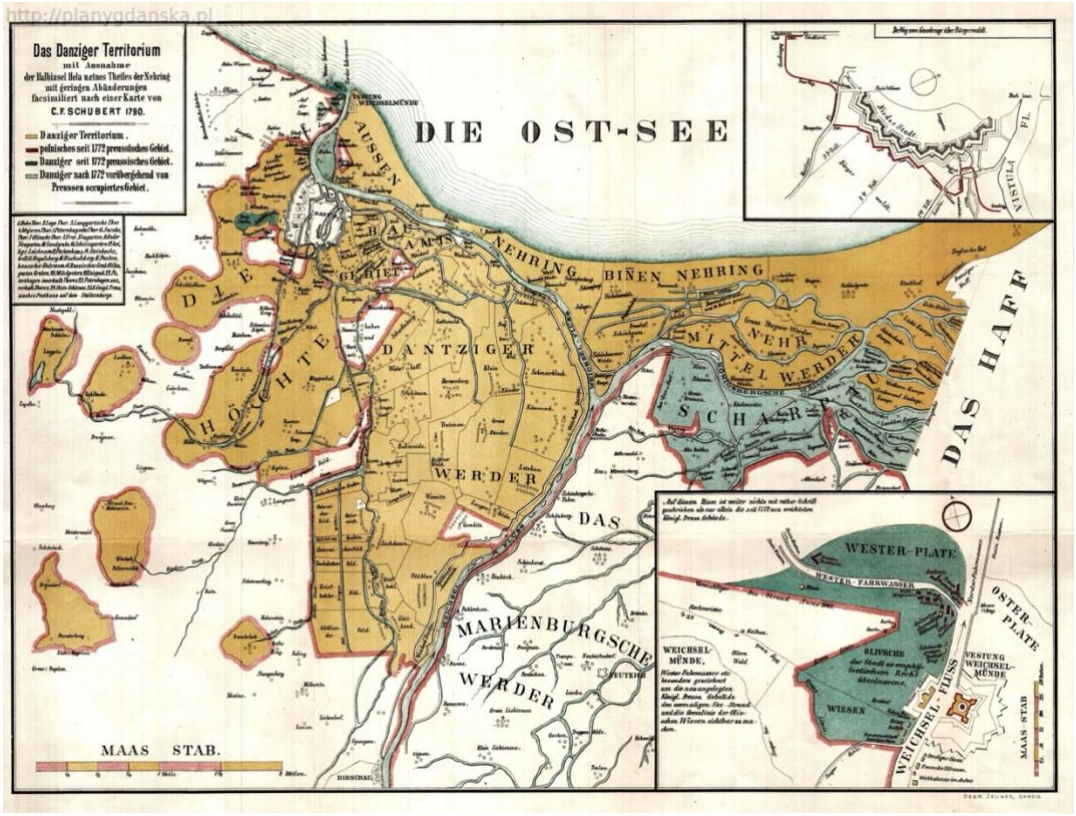


Figure 7 - Timeline of Gdańsk's (Danzig) expanding borders showcasing German influence, 1898, Plany Gdańska

In contrast, maps published by the Polish cartographers and illustrators highlight the city's recent inclusion into the Polish state. Accordingly, they celebrate the unique history of the city, often accompanied by articles and captions that encourage travel and knowledge accumulation of the city's features. Unlike German maps of Danzig/Gdańsk, Polish maps have a more vibrant color scheme and visual appeal, which signifies the reputation of the city and its identity as a unique, standalone region rather than emphasizing Poland's role in connection to the city. Kilarski and Zieliński's *Poznaj Gdańsk* ("Discover Gdańsk"), a guidebook published in 1949, displays Gdańsk's important sectors, visually enhances geographical regions, and symbolizes the Baltic Port, situating Gdańsk as a valuable region within the country's new borders. Figures 8 and 9 are two of the maps available in this feature.

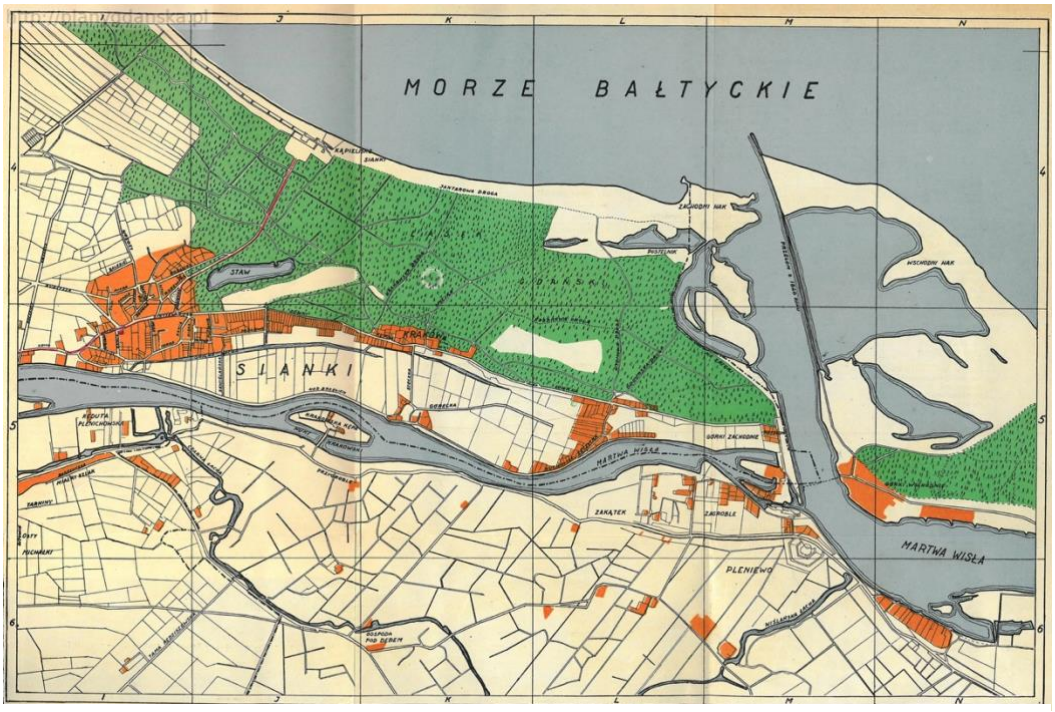


Figure 8 - Map included in Poznaj Gdańsk by Kilarski and Zieliński, 1949, Plany Gdańska

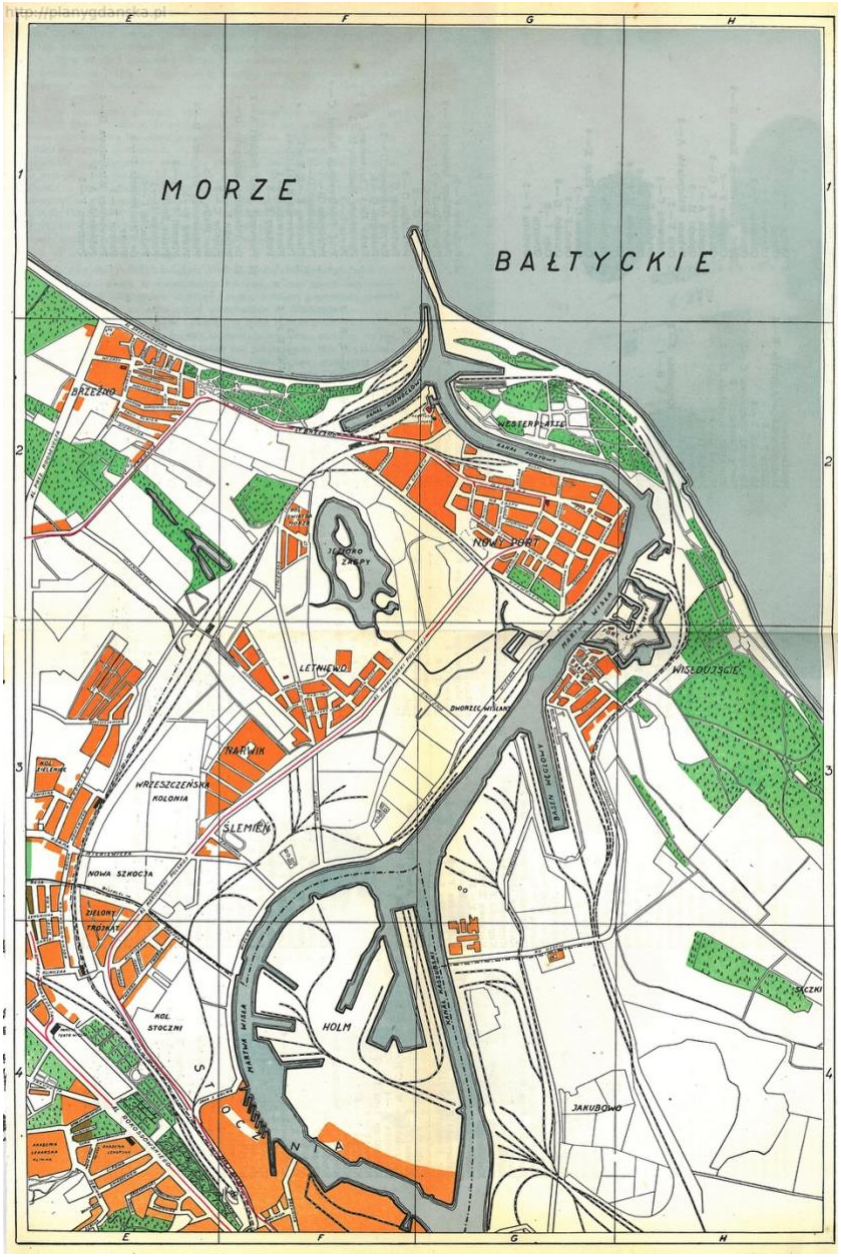


Figure 9 - Map included in Poznaj Gdańsk by Kilarski and Zieliński, 1949, Plany Gdańska

Another interesting inclusion in *Plany Gdańska* is the 1959 publication of a map that accentuates influential historical locations in the city center. With a layered legend and coordination system, Figure 10, entitled *"Gdańsk zabytkowy"* (Historic Gdańsk), maps both the architecture style of sectors within the city and highlights preserved and destroyed buildings/blocks as a result of the war. This map stands out in the archives for many reasons. Namely, it celebrates the rich cultural mix present in the city's architectural style, mapping years of influence on Gdańsk's physical makeup. Unlike other maps published within this timeline, however, *Gdańsk zabytkowy* directly shows the story of Gdańsk's redevelopment and reconstruction, elevating the cartographic style of the mapmaker in question.

These maps are incredibly powerful symbols of pre- and post-war Gdańsk identity and image. The stark differences in the cartographic styles between German and Polish mapmakers and political implications of the maps in question are highly useful in compiling and analyzing evidence of placemaking between the two periods. The German maps, while highly practical and impressive works, seem to exhibit practical applications of mapmaking and tell very direct stories about the connection between the city and the greater German Reich. However, I argue that Polish renderings of Gdańsk following the population transfer seem to commemorate the city's rich history, geography, and individualism, celebrating the city's presence within Poland's formal borders.



Figure 10 - Gdańsk zabytkowy, highlights architectural styles and buildings/blocks preserved and not preserved from warfare, 1959, Plany Gdańska

Current Demographics and Research

The nationalization policies of Poland following the devastating war and occupation by German and Soviet forces facilitated the demographic transfer that is wholly apparent to this day. No city in Poland played a larger or more crucial role in developing the model for Polishness than Gdańsk. Census data and demographic research show that the population transfer following the war has yielded a stronger Polish presence in the city and surrounding powiaty (or counties). According to the 2024 Polish Census, Gdańsk's population sits at 489,160, with the overwhelming majority of residents holding Polish citizenship and ethnicity. This is consistent with the country's German expulsion and deportation strategies following the war but also stems from Poland's strict immigration processes, part of ongoing Polonization efforts, requiring all immigrants to hold official residence status to be officially counted in census records. Accompanied by rising land and housing costs, these immigrants find it increasingly difficult to remain central to Gdańsk and often shift to cities with lower costs of living (Bierzyński et al., 2016).

Gdańsk also currently holds economic and cultural ties with the cities of Sopot and Gdynia, a region recognized as the Tricity. The suburbanization of Gdańsk and the northern region of the Pomeranian voivodeship as a whole led to the development of this relationship, as citizens sought a suburban lifestyle to detach themselves from the high volume nature of inner-city Gdańsk. Despite this, however, Gdańsk remains the most active business hub, immigration destination, and tourist attraction in the Tricity. Much of the current development in the Tricity is spatially located to the east and northeast of

the region due to the nearby Baltic Coast and the cost of land and development rights in the voivodeship (Korwel-Lejkowska, 2021). The Tricity's economic structure is highly connected to its geographical relativity to the Baltic Coast, as maritime industries such as shipbuilding, trading, brokers, and transportation economies dominate the workforce (Nidzgorska-Lencewicz & Czarnecka, 2015; Korwel-Lejkowska, 2021). Despite this, a driving factor of suburbanization and out-migration of Gdańsk to the greater Tricity area comes from the general deindustrialization trend seen throughout the country. Despite Gdańsk historical connection to port operations and industrial economies, the decline in overall participation in these sectors has effected population. According to Bierzyński et al., Gdańsk is experiencing an increase in average age of population in relation to comparable Polish cities less associated with industrial economies such as Krakow and Warsaw who have both seen a consistent rise in population since deindustrialization.

Sites of public memory and symbolization are also sprawled throughout the city but mainly are associated with the Second World War and the Solidarity movement. Consistent with the literature on both placemaking and place promotion, the city has worked tirelessly over the years to move past the devastation of the war and functionalize its identity towards a more commemorative tone. Landmarks such as the Westerplatte memorial, the Museum of the Second World War, and the European Solidarity Museum all commemorate collective memory and the unique history of Gdańsk. However, Polish sociologist Maria Mendel argues that "non-memory" of these incredibly impactful events has led to a necessary delineation between fact and myth in context to Gdańsk's true identity, in spite of its past. Essentially, she asserts that public memory must be honest

and clear – the city with such a stained history cannot rely on myth as its basis for an identity (Mendel, 2013). Regardless, it is impossible to deny the weight of World War II and the Solidarity Movement, both having origins in Gdańsk, on public memory and identity in Gdańsk.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban Regeneration and Placemaking occur in spaces daily. These processes are highly place and space dependent and are incredibly complex practices. In the case of Gdańsk, it is impossible to separate the simultaneous physical destruction and demographic transfer that occur as a result of years of warfare. However, it is precisely this relationship between the physical and the cultural reconstruction that sets Gdańsk apart in urban and cultural geographic studies. I find that the identity and placemaking practices of Gdańsk during the years of regeneration following the war are products of the greater mission by the newly formed Polish state's nationalistic tendencies and Polonization efforts. This is evidenced in many ways, including the city's harsh treatment of German expellees and ethnic Germans that stayed behind, the shift in cartographic methods shown by historical maps published before and after the transition, and the relatively low figures of non-Polish residents that remain in the city. On top of this, Gdańsk holds strong to its economic roots, evidenced by the city's reliance on the harbor as a national symbol and ties to the industrial cluster in the region, despite it being a cause of depopulation and suburbanization trends.

The implications of this line of research extend beyond the case of Gdańsk. First, it provides insight into how states use reconstruction to naturalize new political realities and produce spatial narratives of national identity and, perhaps more importantly, legitimacy. Second, by examining how newly resettled communities create and distribute space, this research contributes to broader human geography themes including

displacement, conflict, and placemaking. Generally, this research can be repeated to unearth a deeper understanding of what happens to a place when the population, political situation, and economic setting is deeply and fundamentally transformed or destroyed.

The findings of this study highlight several areas in which actionable recommendations can be applied, strengthening the evaluation of the research question regarding urban regeneration and placemaking strategies itself and filling even more gaps in the literature. Namely, an addition to the research methods including ethnographic research of the greater Gdańsk population would add a rich layer of understanding the long-lasting effects of the regeneration of the city post-World War II. Discussions with city and voivodeship (county officials) highlighting efforts to maintain a rigid Gdańsk identity would critically enhance the findings of this research. Likewise, an analysis of in person interviews and surveys would alleviate the reliance on archival work and secondary source analysis, allowing for a different perspective on the research findings, with particular emphasis on the effects of Polonization discussed in the first section of Chapter 4.

Another measure of added subtlety to complement this study would be to include a comparative case study approach to the research design of this thesis. In the Polish context, a prime example would be to include an analysis of Warsaw's post-war regeneration, as both Warsaw and Gdańsk approached the uphill battle of physical reconstruction following the destruction caused by warfare. These cities would be excellent to compare, considering their shared history of wartime casualties experienced citywide, but the comparison would become more nuanced mainly to the *differences* of

their plight: Warsaw lacked both the population transfer and the shaky history of sovereignty experienced in the case of Gdańsk. Another city of note to add to this hypothetical is Krakow, the former capital of Poland and another site of cultural symbolism to the country. Unlike both Warsaw and Gdańsk, Krakow escapes nearly unscathed from the war, which very likely separates its post-war plans apart from that of Gdańsk's.

In continuing this research, an analysis of the rise and fall of the Hanseatic League and the cities therein seems to be a very natural approach to take. Each of these cities, with unique ties to German influence and control, share a close economic and political history, and the research question and arguments could quite easily be replicated and reapproached to create a more complete picture. While many academic advantages exist in expanding this research in this direction, the most obvious would be widening the available literature on urban regeneration among the backdrop of conflict and placemaking efforts when cities are faced with extreme social and political transformations.

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