

# portus plus

The Polish seaport-city  
of Gdansk.

A gateway for the Baltic  
Sea EU Macro Region

**Cecilia Scoppetta**

Sapienza University of Rome

ceciliascoppetta@tiscali.it

The case of the waterfront regeneration projects in the Polish seaport-city of Gdansk is analysed in a “fixity and flow” perspective and in the light of the contemporary rethinking of some relevant concepts, such as “territory” and “space” due both to globalization and the European construction.

In fact, post-socialist transformations in the Trojmiasto agglomeration and Gdansk’s regeneration strategies cannot be understood without framing them within the Baltic Sea European Macro-Regional Strategy, which defines a “synaptic space” recalling the historical Hanseatic network of cities.

In this sense, the case of the Polish seaport-city of Gdansk firstly shows that, following Faludi (2010), “geography still matters” (and also history!). Furthermore, it clearly highlights the role of the construction of the European space(s) as a successful factor for Gdansk’s urban projects.

## **Keywords**

**Gdansk; Baltic Sea EU Macro-Regional Strategy;  
Hanseatic space; waterfront regeneration project;  
post-socialist transition; image reconstruction**

# The Polish seaport-city of Gdansk. A gateway for the Baltic Sea EU Macro Region

## **Successful waterfront projects**

Waterfront development projects around the world are to be framed within a “fixity and flow” perspective (Castells, 1996) where “fixities” are available built environment, institutional and regulatory structures and cultural practices, and “flows” are processes of capital accumulations, information, labour, finance capital, energy and knowledge. But “fixity” and “flow” are dialectically related concepts: as cities are considered to be the relatively fixed nodes of a network, some physical urban spaces serve to enhance/retard flows and circulation in the network itself. In this sense, port cities are “on the edge” in more ways than just their physical location: on the one hand, they are involved within a complex de-territorialised network of flows on which their identity is constructed; on the other hand, their territorialisation is given by the particularities of the many fixities that exist in/on them at any historical moment of time.

As it is well-known, globalisation implies significant structural changes for spatial structures and strategies: offering the most productive environment, being “attractive” for investors, enterprises, high-skilled work forces as well as providing a high quality of life including sustainable environments have become the touchstones of economic “success” in globalised markets. EU strategies to face these challenges are aimed to identify and strengthen the economic development potential of all territories focusing on their endogenous territorial capital as a comparative advantage to achieve sustainable economic growth. On the other hand, the Lisbon Strategy introduced new requirements concerning the quality and organization of territorial structures that are to a large degree independent from their location. This concerns innovations like new space-time structures, virtual spatial structures, self-learning structures and intelligent cities and regions.

An acknowledged effect of globalization – all around the world as well as in the EU Countries – is the homogenization of planning approaches in the case of redevelopment urban projects, according to a well-known recipe: finding a derelict industrial or port area (in the latter case, delocalising port activities in a deepwater zone); adding a lot of public/private partnership, a pinch of trendy “creative class” according to Landry’s (2000) and Florida’s (2003) theories, a quantity of entertainment and leisure, a spoonful of (luxury) housing, offices, malls and public spaces, and a handful of tourism. Seasoning with IT facilities; then mixing with an international Olympic or cultural event and with a slowly and carefully cooked strategic planning tool. Finally flavouring with a tasty slogan – such as “young city” or similar – and with an “inclusive” and “shared” participatory process.

The case of the Polish seaport-city of Gdansk firstly shows that, following Faludi (2010), “geography still matters” (and also history!), and, then, clearly highlights the role of the construction of the “EU space” as a successful factor for Gdansk’s urban projects.

## **Towards a “smart” shift**

The Polish seaport-city of Gdansk (461,000 inhabitants) – together with the centres of Gdynia (253,000) and Sopot (40,300), and several smaller urbanised areas – forms the third largest urban agglomeration in Poland (about 1,200,000 inhabitants) called Trojmiasto (“the Three-City”). This name reflects the Davoudi’s definition (2005) of polycentric urban region, characterised by “three or more cities that are historically and politically separate, have no hierarchical ranking, are in reasonable proximity to each other, and demonstrate a high degree of functional interconnections and

complementarities". In fact, according to their historical path, the centres of Gdansk – which is known for the tragic events of its history – Gdynia and Sopot remain strongly autonomous and their differences are reflected in architectures: middle-age and renaissance in Gdansk, eclectics in Sopot (as a fashionable bath of the end of XIX century), Art Deco and modernism in Gdynia (as it was founded in 1926). A rail-line inter-connects the main centres of this polycentric agglomeration, which was (and still is) the main centre of industrialisation in the Country and the leading economic, research and cultural pole of the Polish coastal belt. Beyond playing a role of capital city of a large metropolitan region (from Tczew to Wejherowo, with strong connection with Elblag and Slupsk), Gdansk is the seat of many cooperative institution, such as the Union of the Baltic Cities, the VASAB 2010 and the Baltic Sea States Sub-regional Cooperation programme (BSSSC).

Trojmiasto has first seen the shift from the socialist forced industrialisation to the early post-socialist de-industrialisation; then it has become a symbol of transition because of the recent processes of re-industrialisation, based on high-technology. In fact, as the World War II had left the city completely ruined, during the post-war times it was rebuilt and it became the major seaport of the socialist Republic of Poland. The latter promoted the nationalisation of the existing shipping and chemical industries, the reconstruction of manufacturing sector, and then (1950-60), the consolidation of industrial plants. In the '70s, investments were concentrated in shipbuilding sector leading to the creation of shipyards in Gdansk and in Gdynia, which, later, became the symbol of the historical transformations as the place where the free Trade Union "Solidarity" was born.

Figure 1. Port activities in Gdansk (Photo by the Author)



The collapse of the communist regime, based on a top-down planned economy, obviously marked the crisis of the traditional Polish industrial system, but, at the same time, many new little and medium-size firms associated with innovative high-technology sectors – such as electronics, telecommunications, IT technologies, or cosmetics and pharmaceuticals – started growing in the suburban towns in the surrounding of Gdansk. This growth was supported at the national level by an Action Plan for the Information Society Development in Poland, elaborated by both the Ministry Economy (2001-2006) and the Ministry of Scientific Research and Information Technology (2004-2006). Such a strategy for the computerisation of all areas of economic and social life was implemented in the forthcoming years of EU enlargement (2004), as it was connected with the EU initiative “e-Europe – An Information Society for All”, proposed by the President of EU Commission Romano Prodi in 1999. But in 1998 (that is: before the EU enlargement) the Gdansk’s City Council had already launched a local long-term “e-Gdansk Development Strategy”, aimed at establishing a broadband wireless city through free public Internet

access points and e-offices, also creating a system of Internet gates in order to offer an Internet development support.

As a result, Gdansk currently is one of the eight most attractive locations for IT systems in Europe and No. 31 world-wide. In fact, there are offices of many relevant International companies. This is to be also connected to the establishment (1997) of the Pomeranian Special Economic Zone, involving the municipality of Gdansk. The opportunities presented by the city have also been taken advantage of by local entrepreneurs, who have established such well-known companies as Wirtualna Polska and Young Digital Planet. Furthermore, each year in Gdansk 1.5 thousand IT, electronics and telecommunications specialists graduate from university. Many of the old industrial sites are actually used for different production activities associated with the new high-technology sectors, but there are yet traditional energy, shipping and textile firms.

Why is Trojmiasto so attractive for business?

## **Gdansk as a gateway-city for the Baltic Sea EU Macro-Region**

In the light of the contemporary rethinking of some essential concepts such as “territory”, “governance”, “networking”, “rescaling”, the pan-European *space* - a borderless single market with an internal space mobility – coexists with national *territories*. But EU can no longer simply be viewed as a Europe of nation-states or a putative supra-state: it can rather be conceptualise – and this is its spatial novelty – as a multileveled or networked space of governance.

Even if Brussels had never been granted a direct competence in territorial issues, we can talk about an European “spatial logic”: a sort of soft Europeanization based on a “lateral” approach to territorial planning, which clearly refers to the three relevant contemporary issues of networking, governance and rescaling and which is mainly expressed by the term “polycentrism”. It refers to physical features, such as a multiple centres and diffused growth rather than core-periphery distinctions, but it is also connected with the idea of multi-level governance, which implies (intangible) partnerships between EU institutions, national governments and regional and local authorities. It is easy understanding why this flexible notion of polycentrism – which refers to forms of non-territorial politics which emanate from a multiplicity of *sites* and which cannot be reduced to a single centre – has become a useful way of thinking about the decentred, de-territorialized (and re-territorialized), and dynamic nature of Europe.

Thus, these particular features of the (still ongoing) European construction, on the background of the contemporary spatial re-scaling, have led to the emergence of the so-called “soft spaces” (Haughton *et al.*, 2009), that is: multi-area sub-regions in which regional strategies are being made between or alongside formal institutions and processes. These spaces are often overlapping and characterised by fuzzy geographical boundaries. In a certain sense, we could also talk about “synaptic spaces” (Scoppetta, 2011), whose spatial dimension constantly changes as it is given by the lighting up and turning off of inter-relationships involving not only action potential, but also knowledge as a further learning value towards a co-evolution of places and planning approaches and styles. According to Faludi (2010) these emerging “soft spaces” seem to require a concept of soft rather than hard planning (for soft rather than hard spaces) to be used wherever challenges cut across boundaries demanding joint action.

EU Macro-Regions undoubtedly are one of these emerging soft synaptic spaces. In fact, they are regions comprised of adjacent territories from several different countries that share a number of common challenges. While there may be many such functional regions in Europe, especially connected with geographical features such as river basins, mountain ranges or seas, it is the development of a macro-regional strategy that establishes a macro-region from the European Union’s perspective. For example, the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region – published in the summer of 2009 and often presented as a blueprint for other possible macro-regions – defines a macro-regional strategy as “an integrated framework to address the challenges and opportunities of a particular geographical area”.

Figure 2. The Baltic Sea EU Macro Region  
 (Source: <http://www.eurobalt.org.pl/onas.php?id=2>)



Even though the concept of macro-regions has been used in International relations before, and even though the collaborative work between national and regional actors in the Baltic Sea area has been quite extensive, this EU Strategy brings something new and concrete on methods and actions for sustainable territorial development, as it is aimed at creating a joint platform to enable all partner to act together in a transnational context. During the last twenty years a paradigm shift has taken place in the Baltic Sea Region as cooperation in all levels has changed from earlier bilateral cooperation to multi-level transnational cooperation in networks, for example city or thematic networks, such as the VASAB (Visions & Strategies Around the Baltic Sea 2010) Long Term Perspective and the EU project South Baltic Arc. The networks and cooperation patterns between the local authorities are an existing and well funded resource, but their full potential has not been utilised so far. The EU Baltic Sea Macro-Region Strategy should serve as a pilot case and good example on how the Union addresses challenges related to a specific region, from a transnational and cross-sectoral perspective.

Figure 3. The South-Baltic Arc project and the “Hanseatic path”, included within the VASAB Strategy  
 (Source: [http://www.south-baltic-arc.org/downloads/SBA\\_brochure\\_of\\_outcomes.pdf](http://www.south-baltic-arc.org/downloads/SBA_brochure_of_outcomes.pdf))



The need for an EU strategy for the Baltic countries has largely arisen from the fact that eight of the Baltic Countries became members of the EU with the major eastern enlargement in 2004. But we can say that since the end of the Cold War the development and integration of this region has expanded and deepened. Much of the activity and integration has happened within and between cities and local authorities thanks to cooperative networks – such as the Union of Baltic Cities, the Alliance of Baltic Cities, the Council of Baltic Sea States – as a return to what once was with the Baltic Sea as an important communication channel for thousand of years and flourishing trade in the region. In this sense, we could say that “geography still matters and, therefore, place-based strategies are needed” (Faludi, 2010) and, according to Williams (1996), that “spatial positioning” is one of the key concepts which has still to be considered. This assumes that potential macro-regions share a geographic, historic or symbolic “image” which is seen as a precondition for the development of radical and innovative solutions.

Figure 4. The EU Interreg Network  
(Source: <http://www.bsrinterreg.net/programme.html>)



## Re-labelling Gdansk by waterfront projects within a “fixity and flow” perspective

Gdansk regeneration strategies that are presented here cannot be understood without framing them within the EU Baltic Sea Macro-Regional Strategy. The latter, in fact, constitutes the dimension of “flows” and, at the same time, it follows the “fixity” of the Hanseatic historical pattern, which, in turn, is based on “intangible”, flexible and not hierarchical (mainly economic) “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1998) – or “loose coupling” (Weick, 1976) – among autonomous cities (but not exclusively), which share a transnational unbounded “Hanseatic space” (not “territory”) and which are periodically (not always) able to act as a collective actor to achieve local collective competition goods avoiding the “trap of joint decision” (Scharpf, 1993).

Figure 5. The historical "Hanseatic space"  
 (Source: [http://it.encarta.msn.com/media\\_461547227/Lega\\_anseatica.html](http://it.encarta.msn.com/media_461547227/Lega_anseatica.html))



But this “non material” networking model means also highly “material” connections. In this sense, global attractiveness for investments is given by the seaports of Gdansk and Gdynia, by Gdansk international Lech Walesa airport, and by a network of national and international railways and highways connecting Poland with Southern Europe across Slovakia (E75, E77), with Eastern Countries across Kaliningrad (E22), and with Western Europe across Germany (E28). But Gdansk’s geo-political relevance is particularly given by its position at the meeting point of many EU transportation corridors: we have the EU Baltic Corridor I and the EU Corridor VI. Furthermore, Gdansk is indirectly related also to the EU Corridors IX, III and II.

Figure 6. EU Corridors in Poland: seaside EU Corridor (green), regional EU Corridors II and III (blue) and the main EU Corridors I and VI (pink)  
 (Source: “The Pomorskie voivodeship development strategy 2020”, 2005)

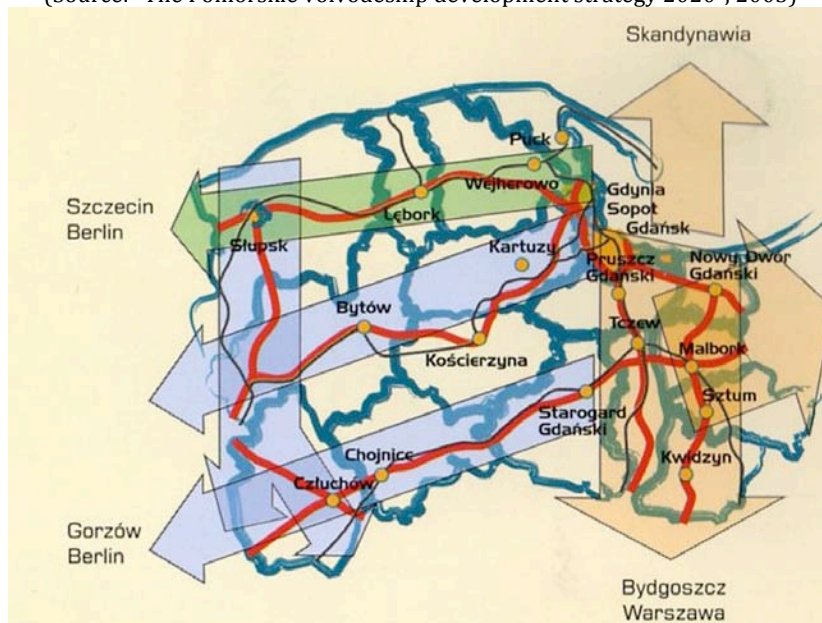
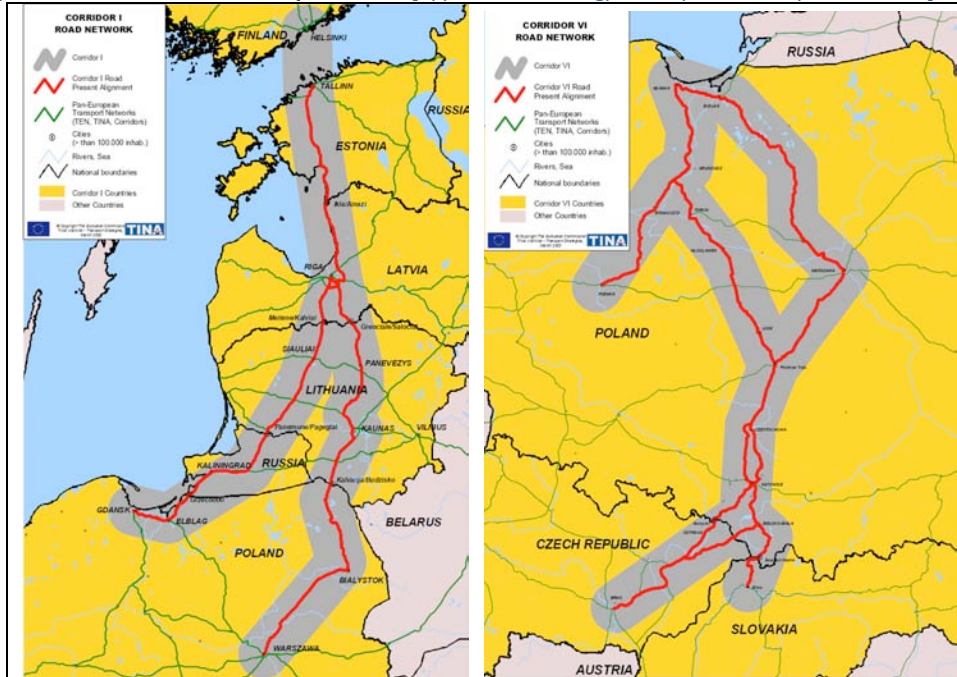


Figure 7. EU Corridors I and VI (Source: <http://www.cemt.org/online/infrastr03/corridormaps.htm>)



Thus, Gdansk follows the above-mentioned well-known and globally tested recipe of the mainstream of urban “physical” renewal in a de-industrialisation context. Relevant urban projects are driven by the existence of abandoning shipyards and other industrial buildings that constitute a vast potential in line with a broadly experimented post-Fordist agenda. But Gdansk’s regeneration projects are to be framed within this “material” and “immaterial” network to understand how new urban spatial organizations – implying a more complex concept of “quality” – can emerge from the transformation of productive activities and modes of communication. Thus, “regeneration” means creating a new profile – a (re)-labelling of the city – according to cultural and economic aspects so that it may reposition itself in a national and international context.

### *Cultural regeneration projects*

In Gdansk the rush to be globally relevant revolves around endogenous historical factors: new identities and perspectives – a new brand for the city – are created through new business approaches and strategies for cultural valorisation in the broadest sense, ranging from the rehabilitation of existent historical and cultural heritage to the development of completely new districts. In fact, it was assumed cultural facilities (and their tourist “declination”) can stimulate the economic development and can take part in improving global competitiveness, producing profits also for the public urban life and spaces. Thus, there are two types of culture-based projects in Gdansk: temporary (although sometimes periodical) and those with more permanent bases and connected with certain organisations or infrastructure.

In the first group there is a number of street fiestas and festivals, in certain cases – as in that of the Saint Dominic’s Fair – dating from medieval times. But we also have some “events”, based on intangible cultural heritage (organ and classic music, theatre, dance), which were more recently established. This group also includes trade events typical for the city’s maritime character, such as fairs connected with ship and yacht industry or with amber trades (with exhibitions and showing the ways of its production). In fact, Gdansk is also known as the world capital of amber: as it is situated at the crossroads of historic amber trading routes, during the city’s golden age at the turn of the XVI and XVII centuries, amber jewellers have developed their own school. Nowadays Gdansk is the seat of the



World Amber Council and its Academy of Fine Arts has a special jewellery studio which trains future master amber jewellery designers.

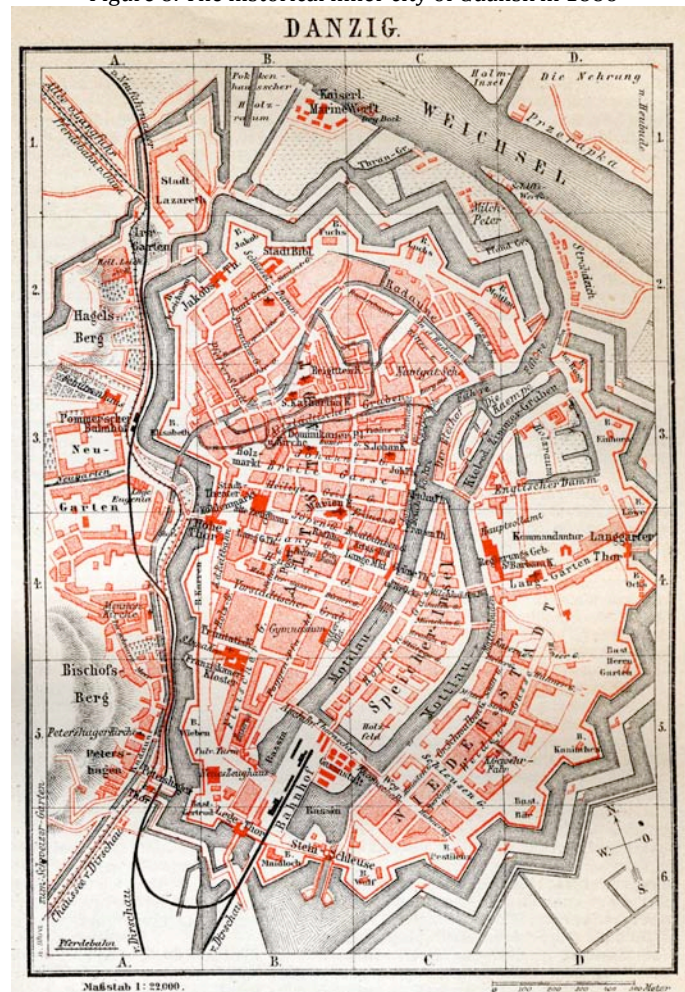
At the same time, we also have contemporary cultural events, which are connected to a global rather than local identity (graffiti, contemporary art, pop music, movie).

All these cultural events are to be also reconnected with the bid to become the European Capital of Culture in 2016.

The second group of projects includes Hevelianum, a science and educational centre in old Napoleon fortification, and Laznia, which involves the building of the old public bath as the starting point for comprehensive revitalisation of the neighbourhood area, within the Town district, a part of the historic inner-city. The latter stayed almost intact during the Second World War, but no investments nor renovation took place there for nearly 50 years. In the '80s the Lower Town was divided from the Main Town by a 6-lane highway. With gradual degradation of the physical structure, social groups which stayed in this part of the city where in the majority those who didn't cope with process of transition to free market economy. High rate of unemployment causing growing poverty and social exclusion led to criminal behaviours. The social and economic problems are addressed by several different projects, aimed at activate and strengthen local community.

Another project – funded by both public (EU, national and regional government) and private partners – is the Gdansk Music and Congress Centre, the new seat of Polish Baltic Philharmonics, situated in a “problematic” neighbourhood, close to the Main Town, the medieval heart of the city. The complex consists of the ancient XVI century Granary and old neo-gothic power plant buildings, built by Berliner company Siemens and Halske in 1898.

Figure 8. The historical inner city of Gdansk in 1886



## *Waterfront regeneration projects*

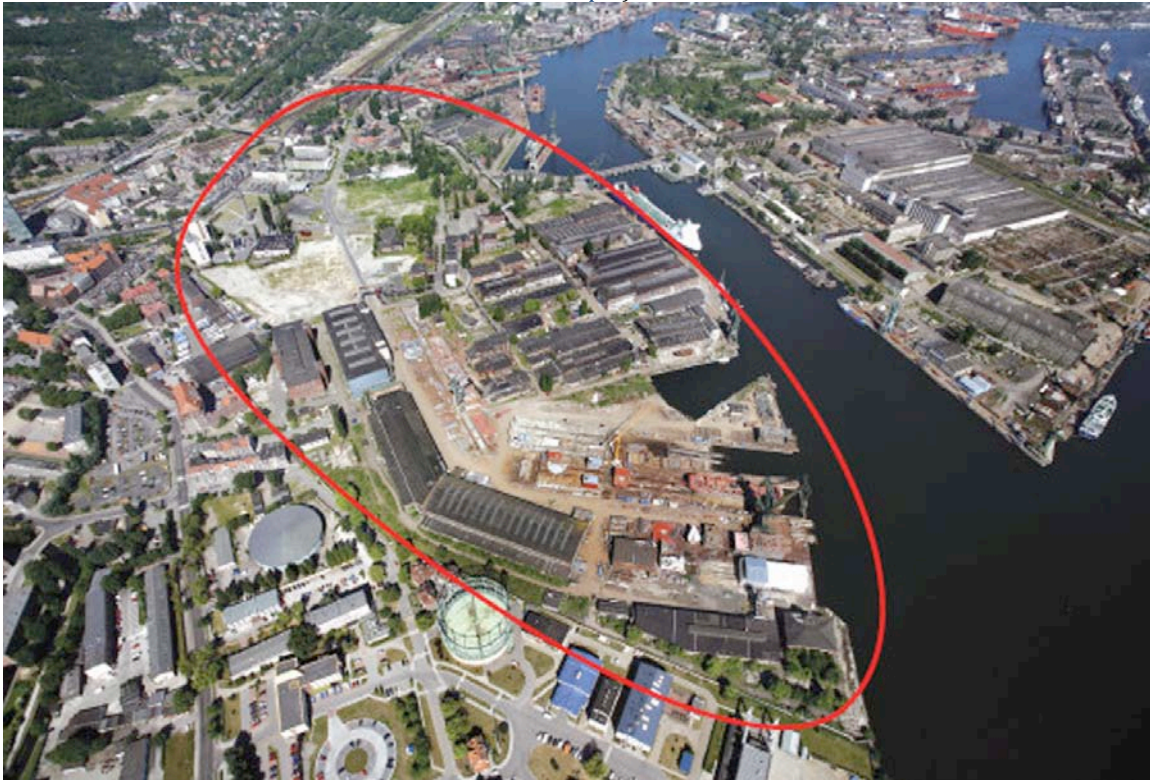
Cultural identity is, therefore, the basis of a (re)-construction of the thematic urban image. But the latter is multi-layered one: in fact, Gdansk defines itself not only as the “capital of amber”, but also as the “city of freedom”, mobilising the symbolic arsenal of its more recent past and connecting it to the historic. The new stadium, in the form of an amber (which is due to be finished in time for the European Football Championship 2012), gives this double image architectural form. This new dual image encompasses, besides the redevelopment of the old town, the construction of a new, second centre, the Young City Centre.

After the shipyards’ bankrupt in 1996, a 55% public controlled company, Synergia 99, was established to administrate the abandoned industrial area and to launch an urban regeneration project called “Young City” (Młode Miasto). Then, in 2006, BPTO Gdansk Development A/S was established in Copenhagen for the purpose of investing in the former Gdansk shipyard area. Its first acquisition of 4.4 ha. was made in 2006 as part of a three phase transaction: in 2007 it acquired another 23 ha. of land and in 2009 an additional 20 ha. In 2008, its Polish subsidiary, BPTO Infra Sp. z.o.o. entered into a cooperation agreement with the City of Gdansk to build roads and infrastructures in the former shipyard. Thus, a main road will allow the development of a new usable office, retail, residential and service space and a fashionable centrally located waterfront (also including a cruise-ship terminal).

This is a typical project of the age of globalisation. In fact it is expected to transform this post industrial shipyard area into a “vibrant” and “dynamic new waterfront destination” and in a “wonderful place for living, working, shopping and leisure”. The new district of over 70 ha. is “only a few minute walk from the central rail station” and includes more than 750,000 m<sup>2</sup> of new usable space to be developed with around 500,000 m<sup>2</sup> of new office spaces, providing permanent jobs to more than 10,000 persons, and with new retail, residential and service facilities. The development of at least 200,000 m<sup>2</sup> of new residential usable space – luxury apartments with waterfront views, close to four or five-stars hotels, shopping centres and smaller retail outlets, cinemas and other entertainment facilities – will attract about 10,000 people to live in. This means that former shipyard provides excellent and diversified investment possibilities – renovation of existing buildings, construction of modern new buildings, and development of infrastructure – for investors and developers willing to join BPTO Gdansk Development A/S in “making Young City happen”.

The symbolism of “freedom” of this “new Gdansk” is given by the presence of the Monument to the Fallen Shipyards Workers, famous from the strike of 1980, and by the fact that the Solidarity Square (in which a European Solidarity Centre will stand) and the “Road to Freedom” – both symbols and places – constitute the entrance to the shipyards regeneration project (and also “into a vibrant future of growth and regeneration”). In addition, a further symbolism of “freedom” is given by the collective memory of thousands of people who came to assist the first rock concerts by Jean Michel Jarre, Rod Stewart and David Gilmour on the spectacular background of giant cranes.

Figure 9. The area of the Young City Project (Source: Baltic Property Trust, Young City Gdansk waterfront, <http://www.balticpropertytrust.com/files/Fund%20materials/BPT%20Optima/Mappe%20Gdansk%20Presentation.pdf>)



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