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Constitution Square in Gdynia

History, Spatial Layout and Architecture

ABSTRACT

Constitution Square is one of the most important elements of the City Centre of Gdynia. Both in the pre–War and the post–War times they built there some major buildings of public and social use, which today create a precious heritage of the Gdynia’s architecture. The origins of the square was connected mainly with the construction of the railway station and its layout was defined mainly in the interwar period, but after 1945 it underwent some major changes. Geometry of the square was shaped in few phases, following on the one hand the demands of the urban plans and on the other the layout of the buildings constructed in this place. The first phase comprises the years 1926– 1928 in which the first town–dedicated railway station was built – yet before the first urban plans for Gdynia were prepared. The second phase comprised the years 1928–1930, when the urban planners designed the spatial shape of the square as an important component of the Gdynia’s City Centre. The subsequent phases were marked by the dates of construction of the main buildings situated here: the State Agricultural Bank (1931), the Municipal and County Court (1936), the postwar railway station (1950) and the post–War postal complex (1965). All the objects built here constitute the distinguish architectural creations, and the distinguish realisation of public and social use. Unfortunately, the postal complex created in the 60. was situated outsides the historical building lines, which has a bad influence on the spatial consistency and cohesion to the whole square. Its harmonious, axial and symmetric composition was lost and consequently the square became only the burdensome communication node without any spatial and aesthetic values. The aim of this article was presenting the development of the Constitution Square in Gdynia and its architecture in the particular phases of development, as well as the composition rules which governed it. The research was meant to became a scientific basis to restore the historical and aesthetic values to the contemporary layout of the square. In conclusion of the article the author presented the conservatory recommendations and the conservation project of revalorisation the Constitution Square in Gdynia.

Keywords: Gdynia, Constitution Square, history, development, architecture, railway stadion, Agricultural Bank, court building, post office

INTRODUCTION

In the interwar period, Gdynia looked like one huge construction site – between 1920 and 1939, both a large, modern seaport and a new city were virtually built from scratch. As soon as the spatial plans had been approved, the construction of seaport basins was commenced, and in the city, the streets and squares were laid out and arranged, and urban development was given a shape. However, the seaport development concept was evolving along with the changing economic situation, and the changes in the layout and size of the seaport basins introduced in 1926–30 had a significant impact on the spatial layout of the entire Gdynia City (Polish: Śródmieście). This was particularly true of the area directly adjacent to the seaport, i.e. the vicinity of the Gdynia railway station. The subject of this article is the creation and spatial development of the square in front of the railway station in Gdynia, i.e. Constitution Square (Polish: plac Konstytucji) initially called Railway Station Square (Polish: plac Dworcowy), as well as the creation and development of its architecture from the 1920s up to the present day.

Constitution Square is one of the most important elements of the structure of Gdynia City Centre. From the very beginning until the present day, important public city buildings have been built there and today they constitute valuable elements of Gdynia’s architectural heritage. The origins of the entire complex were linked to the development of the space in front of the railway station. The spatial form of the square itsel, which was created in several phases was determined both by the buildings erected next to the square and by the changes introduced to the urban concept of the seaport and the city.

The aim of the research is to present the history of Constitution Square and its architecture in its various stages of development, so that this analysis can serve as a basis for restoring the historical coherence of the contemporary layout. The article summary presents the main conclusions drawn from the research as well as main conservation and design guidelines for the restoration of the existing square space. These guidelines were also included in the project of the revitalization of Constitution Square in Gdynia, prepared by the author in 2023 for the city authorities. Research on the subject comprised literature and archival reviews along with inventory and field studies. So far, Gdynia Constitution Square itself has not been the subject of any scientific publications, but some of the buildings standing next to it – two railway stations and the court building – have already been partially presented in the literature, including magazines such as ‘Polski Przemysł Budowlany’ (Eng.: ‘Polish Construction Industry’),¹ ‘Architektura i Budownictwo’ (Eng.: ‘Architecture and Construction’)² and in the monograph Gdynia miasto dwudziestolecia

¹ Wołkanowski, J. (1926). Dworzec Kolejowy w Gdyni [Railway Station in Gdynia]. *Polski Przemysł Budowlany* [Polish Construction Industry], 9–10.

² Karpiński, Z., Sieczkowski, T., & Sołtyński, R. (1938). Gmach Sądów w Gdyni [Court Building in Gdynia]. *Architektura i Budownictwo* [Architecture and Construction], 14, 43–49.

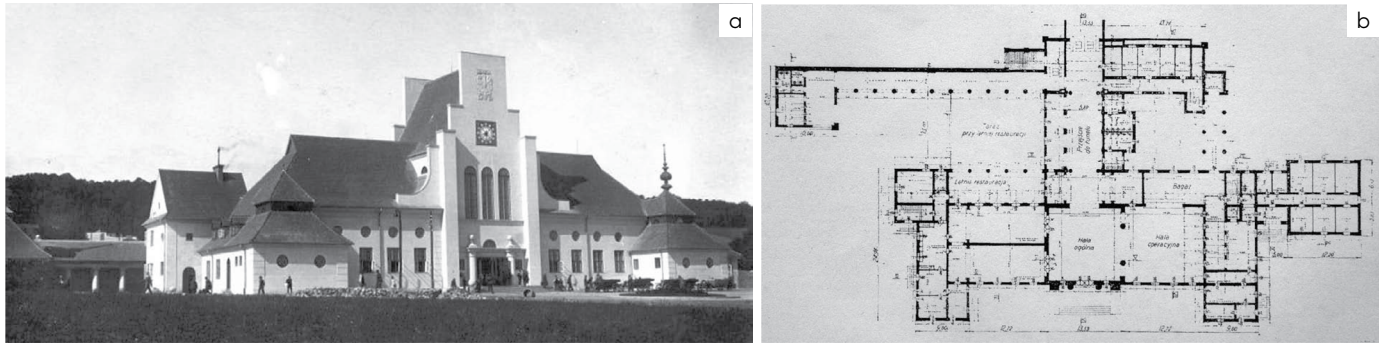


Fig. 1. Gdynia, railway station built in 1926 according to a design by Romuald Miller, destroyed during World War II and no longer extant: a) view from around 1928; source: https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plik:Dworzec_w_Gdyni.jpg, public domain. In front of the railway station, a small square with a round lawn is visible; b) layout of the railway station; source: J. Wołkanowski, "Dworzec Kolejowy w Gdyni," *Polski Przemysł Budowlany*, 9–10, 1926.

międzywojennego. Urbanistyka i architektura (Eng.: *Gdynia – the City of the Interwar Period. Urban Planning and Architecture*).³

THE FIRST 'URBAN' RAILWAY STATION AND RAILWAY STATION SQUARE IN 1926–1928

The first 'urban' railway station in Gdynia was not actually the first in this area. Temporary railway station barracks had existed here since 1894, when a railway stop was established in the village of Gdynia on the Gdańsk–Szczecin railway route. At that time, it was located not on the eastern but on the western side of the railway tracks, right at Szosa Gdańska (Eng.: Gdańsk Road), and for the next two decades it contributed significantly to the development of a summer resort in Gdynia. The location and spatial development of the Gdynia railway station changed in the early 1920s, when, after Poland regained its independence, the construction of the seaport and the city commenced in Gdynia. However, the new railway station was to be built not on the western side of the railway tracks, but on the eastern side, in immediate spatial contact with the Gdynia settlement.

The new railway station was designed in 1923 by Romuald Miller, a well-known architect of interwar Poland. It was an architecturally interesting design, representing modernised forms of romantic–national historicism, where the Polish Renaissance style met elements of Art Deco. The highly articulated plan and building form were centred around the main entrance hall and the passage to the tunnel running under the tracks, encompassing a spacious operation hall (ticket office) on the north side and a restaurant and internal courtyard with a columned gallery on the south side (Fig. 1a, b). The high roofs presented a variety of forms, from gabled and half-gabled to stepped, decorated with small onion domes. The lofty gable of the front façade was stepped and decorated at the top with a bas-relief of an eagle, along with a square clock face and three arcades of elongated windows, under which a two-column entrance portal was located. The interior details of the station, finished in the mid-1920s, featured early modernist Art Deco forms. The entire project was completed in July 1926, and the press at the time wrote about it in a favourable way, saying that '(...) it has so many

³ Sołtysik, M. J. (1993). *Gdynia – miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego: Urbanistyka i architektura* [Gdynia – a city of the interwar period: Urban planning and architecture]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 86, 332–333.

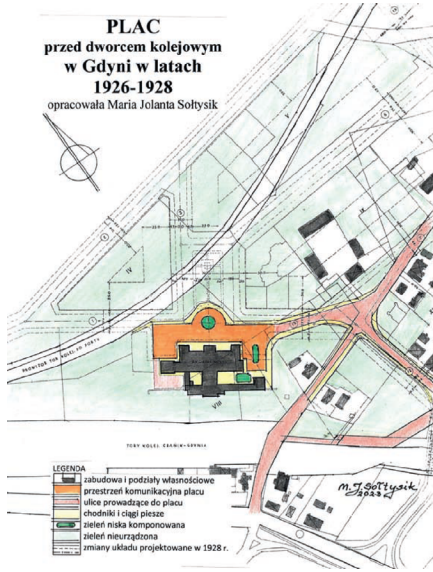


Fig. 2. Gdynia, the square in front of the railway station in 1926–1928, (elaboration and drawing by Maria Jolanta Sołtysik).

outstanding features of Polish architecture that those who know Poland and appreciate the beauty of architectural forms will find here the reminiscence of the monuments of Polish architecture that can be admired in Krakow, Warsaw, Vilnius, Kazimierz nad Wisłą and even in distant Krzemieniec'.⁴

A small square was built in front of the new railway station, which at that time was not yet called Constitution Square, but Railway Station Square (Polish: plac Dworcowy). It took the form of a carefully designed square driveway in the shape of a 'C' rotated by 90 degrees, encompassing the entire front façade and two side façades of the newly erected railway station building. In front of the railway station, the square formed a rectangle approximately 100 m long and 20 m wide (measured to the façade of the building). The axis of the main façade of the station was emphasized by a small, round flower bed (Fig. 2), accompanied by a semicircular road lane with a pavement. From the side of the buildings in Gdynia, the railway station was accessed via a short stretch of what later became Podjazdowa Street, today's Dworcowa Street, and which was connected to Starowiejska Street and 10 Lutego Street. The pavements on both sides of the street led to the main entrance of the railway station and to its side wings with internal courtyards. At that time, on the northern side of the railway station, there was still a temporary railway track to the seaport; that track was dismantled around 1928. The very layout of the railway station complex remained largely unchanged until 1930.

RAILWAY STATION SQUARE IN THE FIRST URBAN PLANS FOR GDYNIA AND ITS DEVELOPMENT UNTIL 1930

Work on the first urban plan for Gdynia was completed in May 1926 when the railway station and the small Railway Station Square accompanying it were almost finished. However, in their new concept, the urban planners proposed not only a thorough reconstruction of the entire square, including the railway station, but also its significant extension.

The first urban plan for Gdynia was called 'An Outline of the Expansion of Gdynia' (Polish: Szkic rozbudowy Gdyni) and was made by Adam Kuncewicz and Roman Feliński.⁵ Its scale was 1:5000, so by its very nature it only showed a general concept of the layout, without any detailed solutions. According to the plan, the square in front of the railway station was to have a new, quite original form, characterised by monumentality. The authors proposed a pentagonal shape for it, geometrically formed by the outline of a rectangle approximately 160 m wide and 80 m deep, with its bottom side based along the railway tracks and with an isosceles right triangle topping it (Fig. 3a) and thus extending the layout to approx. 180 m measuring from the railway tracks. From the triangular apex of the railway square, axially, opposite the railway station, a wide thoroughfare was to run north–east to the seaport, its direction determining the axis of

⁴ Wołkanowski, J. (1926). Dworzec Kolejowy w Gdyni [Railway Station in Gdynia]. *Polski Przemysł Budowlany* [Polish Construction Industry], 9–10.

⁵ This plan and its significance are discussed in the book: Sołtysik, M. J. (1993). *Gdynia – miasto dwudziestolecia międzywojennego: Urbanistyka i architektura* [Gdynia – a city of the interwar period: Urban planning and architecture]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, pp. 100–105.

symmetry of the entire development. Next to it, on the southern side of the thoroughfare, the main downtown axis had its beginning, leading east along a wide street called Aleja Wolności (Eng.: Freedom Avenue) – now Wójt Jan Radtke Street – down to the sea and the seaside square. Five streets were to radiate out from the square in front of the railway station: four from the pentagon vertices (including Starowiejska Street and two streets running in opposite directions along the railway tracks) and one being a mirror image of the main downtown axis, although much narrower and shorter.

The urban concept of the 'An Outline of the Expansion....' also envisaged a significant enlargement of the railway station building itself, proposing the addition of two large side wings on both sides, corresponding spatially with the line of the side frontages of the square. In this way, the railway station building was planned to occupy a significant part of the entire square. Compact frontages, filled with 4-storey buildings, were to form all the square walls. The principle of the entire square composition was symmetry and spatial axiality, and the aesthetic and monumental qualities of the layout were emphasised by two prominent sculptural accents in the form of columns or obelisks, placed symmetrically in the central part of the layout and accentuating the front façade of the station.

Unfortunately, the square designed in 1926 has never been built. Due to the unforeseen development of the seaport and the seaport railway junction towards the south, the entire northern part of Gdynia City Centre was reduced in size, and the detailed plans for the square in front of the railway station also had to be changed.

In 1928, Adam Kuncewicz drew up a detailed plan of the northern part of Gdynia City Centre, entitled 'Gdynia, a development plan of the northern part of City Centre. Section one' (Polish: Gdynia, plan zabudowania północnej części Śródmieścia. Sekcja pierwsza) and drawn to a scale of 1:1000.⁶ The architect took into account the changes resulting from the expansion of the seaport and the fact that the square in front of the railway station was now practically on the edge of Gdynia City Centre, right next to the seaport border which ran along the current Jana z Kolna Street in this area. As a result, in the detailed urban plan of 1928, the square was significantly reduced in size comparing to the plan of 1926, and its width was readjusted to match the layout of the existing railway station designed by Romuald Miller. The expansion of the railway station building planned in 1926 was also abandoned.

Now, the Railway Station Square designed by Kuncewicz consisted of two parts. The first part comprised the railway station forecourt from 1926 in the shape of an inverted letter C, embracing the building with its side wings, approximately 100 m long and 20 m wide. The second, new part of the square was to be a rectangle adjacent to the first part, 68 m wide and 84 m long, which, counting from the station façade, gave a total length of 104 m (Fig. 3b). The walls of the new part of the square were to be formed by compact building development – three newly designed frontages with five-storey

⁶ Detailed plans for Gdynia City Centre are discussed in the book: Soltysik, M. J. (2003). *Na styku dwóch epok: Architektura gdynskich kamienic okresu międzywojennego* [At the turn of two epochs: Architecture of the apartment houses of Gdynia in the interwar period]. [Publisher not identified], pp. 50–51.

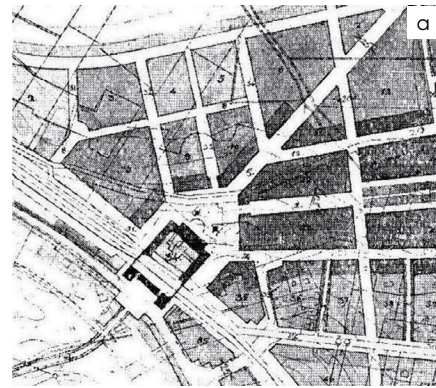


Fig. 3. Gdynia, the square before the railway station in the first urban plans of the town: a) a fragment of the plan 'Szkic rozbudowy Gdyni' by Adam Kuncewicz and Roman Feliński from 1926 (source: 'Architektura i Budownictwo', 1926); b) a fragment of the plan 'Gdynia, plan zabudowania północnej części Śródmieścia. Sekcja pierwsza' by Adam Kuncewicz (source: private collection of M. J. Soltysik).



Fig. 4. Gdynia, the square before the railway station in the first urban plans of the town: a) a fragment of the plan 'Szkic rozbudowy Gdyni' by Adam Kuncewicz and Roman Feliński from 1926 (source: 'Architektura i Budownictwo', 1926); b) a fragment of the plan 'Gdynia, plan zabudowania północnej części Śródmieścia. Sekcja pierwsza' by Adam Kuncewicz (source: private collection of M. J. Soltysik).

buildings, reaching 18 m in height. Pavements with a width of four to five metres and 15-metre-wide traffic lanes were designed along them. Inside the new rectangular part of the square, Adam Kuncewicz designed a spacious green area which emphasised the shape of the square and which was inscribed in a rectangle measuring 24 by 82 metres, not including the surrounding 2.5-metre-wide pavement. The architect clearly separated the green area from the railway station building itself, leaving a large space in front of it for a driveway. The green area designed by Kuncewicz was divided into a Latin cross shape with a square flower bed and a pedestrian walkway in the northern part and a semicircular 'invitation' from the railway station side.

The layout of the streets leading from the square, of which there were now only four, also underwent a fundamental change in relation to 'An Outline of the Expansion of Gdynia' from 1926. The former thoroughfare that used to be the most important of them and which led to the port was, now as a result of changes, blocked by the railway junction within the seaport marshalling yard and, therefore, lost its purpose and was maintained only in a rudimentary form from the northern corner of the square to what later became Jana z Kolna Street. Its direction determined the north-western frontage of the square. The street leading from the north-eastern corner of the square, initially called Aleja Wolności (Eng.: Freedom Avenue) and later Aleja Mościckich (now Wójt Jan Radtke Street), also lost its original significance as the main axis of the city centre. Its width at the exit from the square was set at 21 metres in the new plan. The most important and widest traffic route leading from the square in front of the railway station was a street later called Podjazdowa, today's Dworcowa Street (28 m). The old railway intersection with Szosa Gdańska (Eng: Gdańsk Road), still in use in 1928, located at the end of Starowiejska Street was to be closed, and the crossing to the other side of the railway tracks was to run through a newly designed tunnel under the tracks in the continuation of 10 Lutego Street. The fourth street leading from the square in front of the railway station ran parallel to the railway tracks at the end of Podjazdowa (Dworcowa) Street in a north-westerly direction and connected to the street later called Okrężna leading to Oksywie (now Janek Wiśniewski Street).

The detailed plan for the northern part of the city centre from 1928, approved in the same year by the Ministry of Public Works in Warsaw (Polish: Ministerstwo Robót Publicznych w Warszawie), became the actual basis for the development of this part of the city, including, with only minor changes, the square in front of the railway station. At the time the plan was being approved, the railway station was still the only building in the area,⁷ and until 1930, the strip in front of its front façade was the only developed and paved part of the Railway Station Square (Fig. 4).

⁷ The building of the State Agricultural Bank, Polish: Państwowy Bank Rolny, shown in the 1928 plan, was not completed until 1930 and must therefore have been added later. Around the same time, a small functionalist building of unknown purpose was also erected next to the railway station, along the then undeveloped street that would later become Okrężna Street, as can be seen in archival photographs.

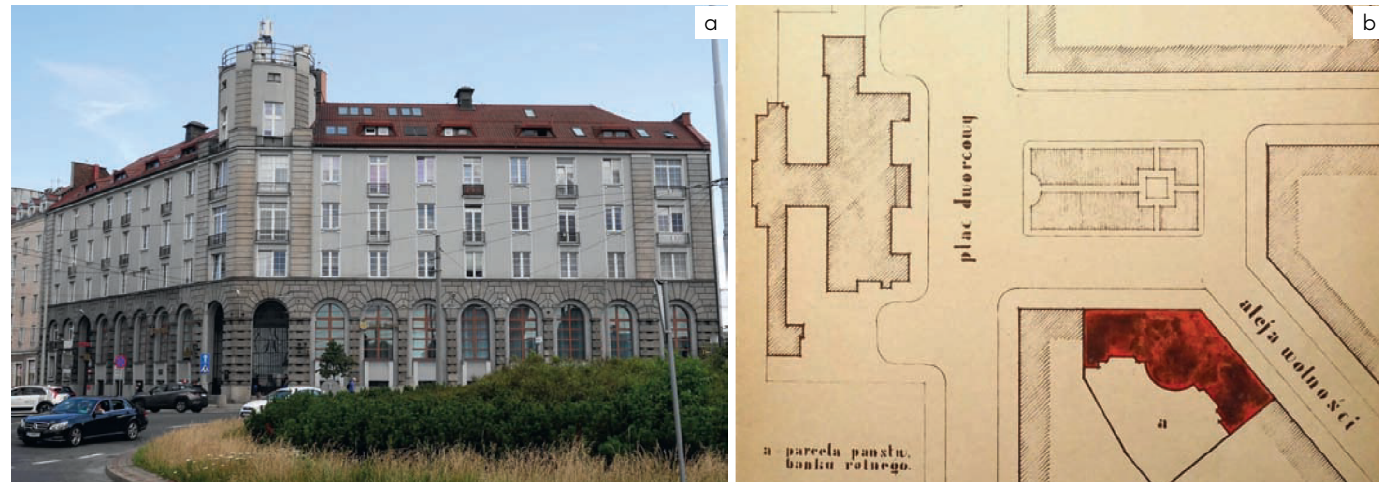


Fig. 5. Gdynia, the former State Agricultural Bank (now the PKO SA Bank Branch), 53 Wóła Radkego Street: a) photo Maria Jolanta Sołtyś, 2023; b) situation plan according to the design by Marian Lalewicz from 1930 (source: Akta Archiwum Budowlanego Urzędu Miasta Gdyni, sygn. 6/53).

CONSTRUCTION OF THE STATE AGRICULTURAL BANK (POLISH: PAŃSTWOWY BANK ROLNY) AND THE RAILWAY STATION SQUARE IN 1931–1935

Neither the general plan discussed above nor the detailed plan for Gdynia downtown stipulated what buildings were to be constructed in the square in front of the railway station, still officially known as Railway Station Square (Polish: plac Dworcowy). As it turned out soon, the investors themselves decided about this. The State Agricultural Bank was the first one that chose this location for the construction of its headquarters in 1928. The building was to form part of the south-eastern frontage of the square, at the intersection with the prominent Aleja Wolności (Eng: Liberty Avenue), later called Mościckich Street, and today's Wójt Jan Radtke Street. Its façade was to belong half to the square layout and half to the avenue layout.

The first design of the building, strongly historicist in style, was created by Warsaw architect Paweł Wędrzgałowski, but it was not approved by the Ministry of Public Works (Polish: Ministerstwo Robót Publicznych) because the building height was lower than the one specified in the urban development plan. Then, in 1930, another representative of Academic Classicism, Professor Marian Lalewicz of the Faculty of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology, presented his ambitious concept.⁸ His design is dated March 1930 and already constitutes a spatial proposal fully adapted to the scale of the city development, although the stylistic costume adopted by the architect was already somewhat outdated in the increasingly modernist Gdynia.

The building architectural composition, maintained in the spirit of Academic Classicism, was based on universal classical principles, practically without ornamentation, with a dominant arcaded plinth storey, continuing the ancient traditions and those of Bramante's traditions. The building wide corner was emphasized by a quasi-turret, but not covered, as one might expect, with a corner dome, but with a flat ceiling, which showed a certain modernisation of the form (Fig. 5a, b). The main interior, clearly already modernised,

⁸ Akta Budowlane. Archiwum Wydziału Architektoniczno-Budowlanego Urzędu Miasta w Gdyni, sygn. 6/53 [Construction Files. Archive of the Architecture and Construction Department of the City of Gdynia, ref. no. 6/53].

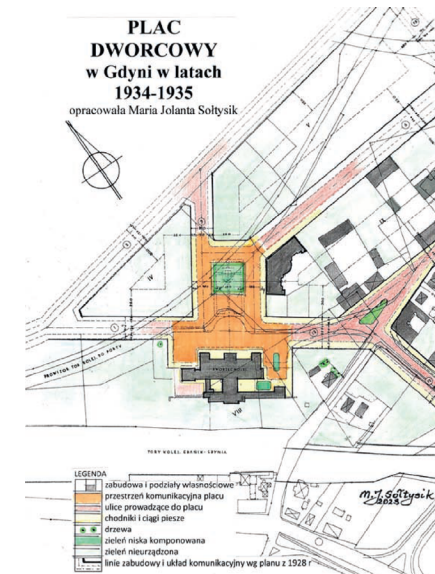


Fig. 6. Gdynia, the square in front of the railway station Dworcowy Square) in 1934–1928, (elaboration and drawing by Maria Jolanta Sołtyś).



Fig. 7. Gdynia, the County and Town Court Building, 5 Konstitution Square, 1938, architects Z. Karpiński, T. Sieczkowski, R. Sołtyński (source: Cyfrowa Biblioteka Narodowa Polona, photo. H. Podębski, sygn. <https://fotopolska.eu/826603,foto.html?o=b3470> public domain).

was outlined in an interesting way by a semicircular columned colonnade. The entrance hall was also attractive, with large windows and a softly outlined staircase.

The State Agricultural Bank, constructed in 1931, was built precisely within the lines of the Railway Station Square designed by Adam Kunciewicz in 1928, and constituted the second implementation that defined its layout.⁹ Between 1931 and 1935, the square continued to be developed according to the detailed plan from 1928: there were still four streets leading out from it: Aleja Wolności (later Mościckich Street, now Wójtana Radtkego Street), Podjazdowa Street (now Dworcowa Street) and two short unnamed streets ending at Jana z Kolna Street – one leading north-east towards the seaport, and the other being the continuation of Podjazdowa Street, north-west to Okrężna Street.

In 1934, a new element appeared inside the Railway Station Square – a square green area, located not centrally but leaning slightly towards the north-east. It appeared on the city map for the first time in 1935 but in comparison with the green area designed in 1928 by Adam Kunciewicz it was significantly smaller (Fig. 6). The entire circulation space of the square was probably already paved, and it as well as the pavements followed the building lines defined in the urban development plan.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE COURT BUILDING AND THE LAYOUT OF CONSTITUTION SQUARE IN 1936–1939

The year 1936 was the decisive one for the history and spatial shape of the square in front of the railway station. First of all, the square was given the new name: Constitution Square, which has been used until today. Secondly, it once more partly changed its form. In 1936, on the north-eastern side of the square, opposite the railway station, a new building was erected, which largely defined the layout of the square – the monumental building of the District and Municipal Courts, and Public Prosecutor's Office. The building was to occupy the entire square frontage, with its side wings reaching Mościckich Street (now Wójt Jan Radtke Street) on one side and Jana z Kolna Street on the other.

The court building design was the result of an architectural competition from 1934. The winners were three young Warsaw architects: Zbigniew Karpiński, Tadeusz Sieczkowski and Roman Sołtyński.¹⁰ Their fully modernist concept represents a trend of moderate modernism, visually striking with the white elegance of the streamlined façade and the almost abstract rhythm of small vertical windows. The wide-arched building was accentuated by the lofty avant-corps of the central part, located on the compositional square symmetry axis, opposite the main entrance to the railway station. The symmetry of the design was emphasised on both sides by slightly lower avant-corps of the side wings, protruding forward (Fig. 7). The interior was dominated by an elegant pillar hall

⁹ The building visible on some archival maps from 1931–1932, located on the site of the later Court building, was temporary in character.

¹⁰ Karpiński, Z., Sieczkowski, T., & Sołtyński, R. (1938). Gmach Sądów w Gdyni [Court Building in Gdynia]. *Architektura i Budownictwo* [Architecture and Construction], 14, 43–49.

with expressively designed staircases on its both sides and sophisticated patterns on the floors and benches.

The construction of this building contributed to a significant correction of the layout of the northern corner of Constitution Square. The short, narrow street that ran from here to Jana z Kolna Street was now directed diagonally, further north, increasing the width of the frontage on which the Court building was located (Fig. 8). From there, this short street ran symmetrically to the direction of the former Mościckich Street (now Wójt Jan Radtke Street), opening up a wide view of the new building. In front of its entrance, two trees were planted at the front avant-corps, emphasising the axis of the building. The 'Greater Gdynia' plan (Polish: plan 'Wielka Gdynia') from 1936¹¹ shows that a short section of the road extending from the former and present Dworcowa Street to Okrężna Street, leading to Oksywie, gained significant importance because a bus line was established (or was planned to be established) along it. It was probably also paved at that time. In 1936, the layout of the green area of Constitution Square and the main streets leading from it (the current Dworcowa and Starowiejska Streets) was also given its 'final' shape, presenting a coherent and geometrically thought-out composition. First of all, trees were planted, which, in accordance with tradition, followed the building development lines, outlining the layout of pavements and, together with the buildings, creating the 'walls' of the square and the neighbouring streets (Fig. 8). A row of trees was also planted along the north-western frontage of the square, which was not yet built up. The very next year, in 1937, trees were planted on both sides of Mościckich Street (now Wójt Jan Radtke Street), leading to the newly built Market Halls (Polish: Hale Targowe). The square green area, developed earlier, in the north-eastern part of the railway square was surrounded by a pavement strip and flower beds, emphasising its central part and each of its four sides separately.

CONSTRUCTION OF THE NEW RAILWAY STATION AND CONSTITUTION SQUARE BETWEEN 1945 AND 1965

During the German occupation in World War II, Constitution Square remained virtually unchanged, retaining the form it had already had in the interwar period. There was still a square green area with flower beds in front of the court building, and a spacious parking and circulation area in front of the railway station.

However, during the war, the railway station building was severely damaged and burned down, therefore, shortly after the end of the war, a decision was made to demolish the building and erect a new, much larger one in its place. The new station (Fig. 9) was designed by Waław Tomaszewski, and its construction began in 1950. The main body of the building was constructed on the site of the old railway station, and the location of the main entrance and the railway station tunnel remained unchanged. The main hall with ticket offices and a tunnel with entrances to the platforms were put into operation in 1954. From then on, the railway station became operational, although the

¹¹ *Wielka Gdynia* [The Greater Gdynia]. (1936). Plan, scale 1:15,000. Morska Agencja Reklamowa 'MAR'. Muzeum Miasta Gdyni.

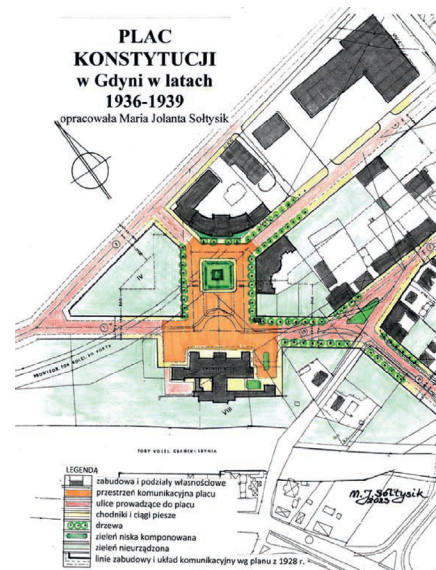


Fig. 8. Gdynia, Constitution Square (the former Dworcowy Square in front of the railway station) in 1936–1939, elaboration and drawing by Maria Jolanta Sołtysik).



Fig. 9. Gdynia, the new railway station, construction 1950, arch. Waław Tomaszewski, (photo Maria Jolanta Sołtysik 2012).

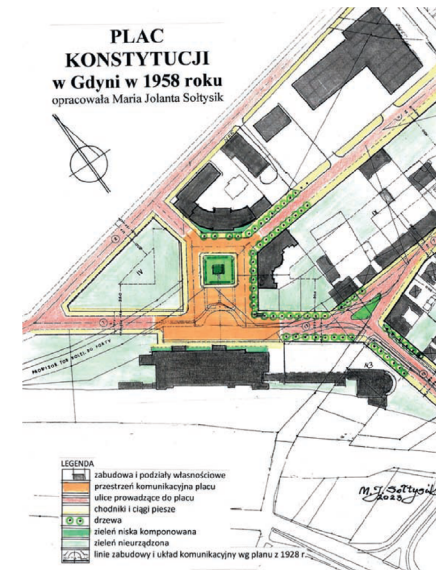


Fig. 10. Gdynia, Constitution Square in 1958, (elaboration and drawing by Maria Jolanta Sołtysik).

multi-storey administrative part, the side hall and the elaborate décor of the restaurant interior were still not ready. At the same time, between 1956 and 1959, from the south side, a suburban railway station was built in the immediate vicinity and was connected to the main railway station building through a pillar arcade, forming a single complex.

The construction of a new railway station, significantly larger than the previous one, brought about a significant change in the layout of Constitution Square. It should be noted that the front façade of the main body of the new building was much longer than that of the old station, extending over 35 metres further to the north-west. It also had not one, but two entrances – one main entrance, in its traditional location, at the continuation of the tunnel under the railway tracks, and the other shifted to the north-west, corresponding to the increased length of the façade and ensuring its symmetry. At the same time, both entrances – despite their functional inequality – were given a uniform, equally attractive architectural design in the form of identical, strongly exposed and protruding two-column porticos. When designing this second entrance, Waław Tomaszewski introduced a new, strong compositional element to the layout of Constitution Square which was unrelated to the traditional compositional axis of the square and shifted approximately 35 m (measured along the axes of both porticos) north-west in relation to it. It was the first compositional breach in the spatial integrity of the square layout. This compositional dissonance was partially compensated by Tomaszewski with two measures: firstly by placing the main entrance portico, the southern one, exactly on the traditional axis of symmetry of the square, in the place of the main entrance to the old railway station, opposite the central avant-corps of the court building. Secondly, the other entrance portico, the one moved to the side, was located opposite the existing pedestrian walkway along the undeveloped north-western line of the square (Fig. 10) – the layout that still functions nowadays.

As a result of these changes and due to the fact that the north-western frontage of Constitution Square, outlined in the plan from 1928, still remained undeveloped, the open space in front of the railway station expanded significantly. Today it is difficult to say whether it was also planned to widen the square itself by moving this undeveloped frontage line further north-west. A photograph from the late 1950s¹² shows that the pavement in front of this line was slightly widened and, just like before 1939, there was still a taxi rank in the roadway along it. The same archival photograph shows the already paved and developed section of the street leading north-west from Constitution Square to Oksywie and the former Okrężna Street (then Marchlewskiego Street, now Janek Wiśniewski Street). At that time, it was of significant importance, as it was used not only by the bus line planned as early as 1936, but also by the trolleybus line, which is clearly visible in the photograph.¹³ Densely spaced trolleybus poles were erected along the still

¹² Gdyni przedwojenny i powojenny dworzec na starych zdjęciach [Pre-war and post-war railway station in Gdynia in old photographs]. (2019, June 2). *Gdynia moje miasto*. Retrieved December 3, 2023, from <https://gdynia-moje-miasto.pl/gdynkipzedwojenny-i-powojenny-dworzec-na-starych-zdjeciach/>

¹³ Gdyni przedwojenny i powojenny dworzec na starych zdjęciach [Pre-war and post-war railway station in Gdynia in old photographs]. (2019, June 2). *Gdynia moje miasto*. Retrieved December 3, 2023, from <https://gdynia-moje-miasto.pl/gdynkipzedwojenny-i-powojenny-dworzec-na-starych-zdjeciach/>



Fig. 11. Gdynia, the postal complex, 2 Constitution Square, construction 1965, arch. Bogusław Bielecki, (photo Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, 2023).

undeveloped north–western frontage of Constitution Square, as well as on both sides of Dworcowa Street. The transport routes were accompanied by bus shelters, one of which had existed since 1937 in Dworcowa Street at the corner of the square, and the other, new one, on the pavement in front of the non–developed north–western frontage, at the taxi rank.¹⁴ Probably because of the trolleybus line construction, a row of trees was cut down along this undeveloped square frontage, therefore, one cannot see them in the aforementioned photograph from the late 1950s. Cutting down this row of trees was another unfavourable change leading to the spatial disintegration of the Constitution Square layout.

RAILWAY STATION POST OFFICE LOCATION AND CONSTITUTION SQUARE AFTER 1965

Starting in the 1960s, the spatial layout of Constitution Square underwent further unfavourable changes. The main cause and catalyst for these changes was the construction and commissioning in 1965 of a new, large postal facility, then known as Separate Railway Post Office (Polish: Wydzielony Dworcowy Urząd Pocztowy) which used a special railway siding leading to the post office dispatch halls. The main designer and author of the project that was completed in 1960 at the Warsaw Office of Studies and Designs for Communications (Polish: Biuro Studiów i Projektów Łączności) was architect Bolesław Bielecki.¹⁵ In 1963 when the construction had already begun, the very

¹⁴ Gdyniński przedwojenny i powojenny dworzec na starych zdjęciach [Pre-war and post-war railway station in Gdynia in old photographs]. (2019, June 2). *Gdynia moje miasto*. Retrieved December 3, 2023, from <https://gdynia-moje-miasto.pl/gdynskiprzedwojenny-i-powojenny-dworzec-na-starych-zdjeciach/>

¹⁵ Akta Budowlane. Archiwum Wydziału Architektoniczno–Budowlanego Urzędu Miasta w Gdyni, sygn. 12/2 [Construction Files. Archive of the Architecture and Construction Department of the City of Gdynia, ref. no. 12/2].

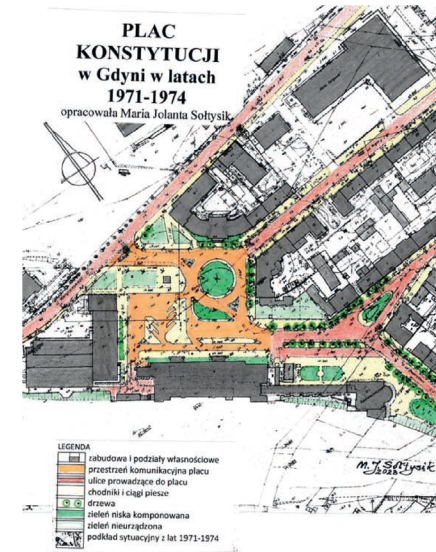


Fig. 12. Gdynia, the postal complex, 2 Constitution Square, construction 1965, arch. Bogusław Bielecki, (photo Maria Jolanta Sołtysik, 2023).

architect introduced minor changes to his concept at the investor's request, including raising the office and residential building by one storey.¹⁶

The new post office was a complex of buildings located on a large plot of land covering over one hectare, adjacent to the railway tracks on one side and approximately 60 metres from the undeveloped north–western frontage of Constitution Square on the other. The complex consisted of four large interconnected buildings: (1) an 8–storey office and residential building with a post office on the ground floor, originally planned to have had 7 storeys; (2) an adjacent, heavily glazed two–storey hall serving as a Foreign Exchange Warehouse (Polish: Magazyn Wymiany Zagranicznej) connected to the Customs Office, positioned parallel to the undeveloped north–western frontage of the square; (3) a large, single–storey 'railway carriage hall' for postal transshipments, located along the railway tracks, with a special railway siding; and (4) a four–storey sorting office adjacent to the railway carriage hall. The entire structure, shaped like the letter L, sculpted and spatially diverse, was an interesting example of post–war modernist industrial architecture of the 1960s (Fig. 11). Its main façade, composed of contrasting heights, was expressively shaped, and the interiors were particularly impressive due to the interesting roof structure of the railway carriage hall. However, the concept of the building location, which was not related to the historical spatial structure of Constitution Square, contributed decisively to the disintegration of its overall design.

The concept of the post office complex construction was burdened with two major location mistakes:

- 1) the core of the post office complex was located approx. 60 m behind the historical north–western frontage of Constitution Square, completely ignoring the principle of situating buildings along frontage lines, symmetrically to the main axis of the square, which was fundamental to the spatial concept of the square;
- 2) the adopted location of the post office complex eliminated and built up the street running from the south–western corner of Constitution Square to the contemporary Marchlewskiego Street (i.e. the former Okrężna Street), thus blocking the main transport link between Constitution Square and the road to Oksywie.

As a result of these two mistakes, the historical geometry of Constitution Square, based on a rectangular shape with the main axis between the railway station and the court buildings, was destroyed, and the main traffic flow was directed to the interior of the square and ran diagonally from the south–eastern corner at the intersection with Dworcowa Street to the northern corner at the intersection with Jana z Kolna Street. Soon, a large traffic roundabout was built inside the square, accompanied by several amorphous traffic lanes. In front of the post office complex, adjacent to Constitution Square, a bus and car manoeuvring area and parking space, also of a random shape, were created (Fig. 12). All this added to the chaos of the entire layout. In the early 1970s, another 'element of chaos' was added: a substandard, free–standing traffic control

¹⁶ Akta Budowlane. Archiwum Wydziału Architektoniczno–Budowlanego Urzędu Miasta w Gdyni, sygn. 12/2 [Construction Files. Archive of the Architecture and Construction Department of the City of Gdynia, ref. no. 12/2].

centre for the Municipal Transport Company, which was erected on the pavement in the northern part of the square.

Over the next few decades, practically until the present day, the spatial situation of Constitution Square has not changed much from the one described above. The exception to that presumed stability was the gradual removal of trees that had lined the pavements around the square since 1936 and the conversion of the roadside verges into parking spaces for cars, buses and trolleybuses. Of the entire row of trees on the south–eastern frontage of the square, next to the PKO Bank, only one tree (a Swedish whitebeam) has remained until today, and next to it, in front of the court building, only two (also Swedish whitebeams) have survived. The trees along the northern pavement of Dworcowa Street and the southern pavement of Wójt Jan Radtke Street have been entirely cut down, and only two Swedish whitebeams have survived on the northern pavement of the latter. Meanwhile, the small ZKM /Eng.: a public transport company/ traffic control centre building, almost invisible when erected in the 1970s, has grown more than doubling in size and has been surrounded by additional technical equipment, visually ruining the exposed area of the inner part of the square.

SUMMARY AND DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR THE REDEVELOPMENT OF THE SQUARE (2023)

The spatial shape of Constitution Square was defined in its general outline in the interwar period as a geometrically coherent spatial layout with outstanding architectural qualities, a friendly space filled with composed green areas for pedestrians and logically arranged circulation routes. The buildings from that period that form its frontage today, the former State Agricultural Bank and the District Court building, are two prominent elements of the architectural heritage of the 1920s and 1930s. Since 1945, the shape of Constitution Square and its development have undergone significant changes. Although both buildings erected here after the war – the new railway station and the post office complex – constitute successful examples of the style of their times, they both have contributed to the spatial disintegration of the place where they are located – Constitution Square. In particular, the post office complex, built in 1965, destroyed the historical layout of the square because of its location. Today, this situation urgently requires restoration.

The inspiration for restoring the spatial coherence and aesthetic value of Constitution Square should be the continuation of the compositional principles adopted in urban development plans and projects from the interwar period.¹⁷ The resulting design

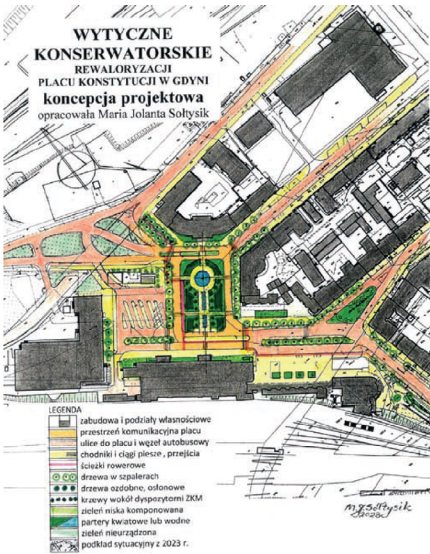


Fig. 13. Gdynia, conservatory recommendations and conservation project of revalorisation of the Constitution Square, (elaboration and drawing by Maria Jolanta Sołtysik).

guidelines for the redevelopment of the square are presented graphically in Figure 40 (Fig. 13), and their main recommendations are primarily as follows:

The functional and visual division of the square into two parts separated by a row of trees: (1) the eastern part, intended mainly for pedestrian traffic and constituting the historical spatial layout of the square, with an internal green area, and (2) the western part, functioning as a transport hub and bus station located in front of the post office complex;

Restoring the symmetrical layout of the eastern, historical part of the square along its traditional axis, running from the main entrance to the railway station to the main entrance to the court building;

Designing the square internal green area in an attractive way, emphasising its historical axis, preserving the principle of symmetry and emphasizing the main place from which the view opens up to the architecture and streets leading out from the square;

Completion of the north–western and part of the south–eastern frontages of the square, left unfinished in the interwar period, in accordance with their historical building lines, including the restoration of the rows of trees that once ran along the pavements. If the completion of these frontages is not currently possible, only the rows of trees along the pavements should be restored.

¹⁷ The design guidelines for the redevelopment of Constitution Square, together with the historical and urban analyses, were prepared by the author in 2023 for the City Council of Gdynia in the study: Sołtysik, M. J. (2023). *Analiza historyczno-urbanistyczna i wytyczne konserwatorskie dla rewaloryzacji placu Konstytucji w Gdyni* [Historical and urban analyses and conservation guidelines for the revitalisation of Constitution Square in Gdynia]. City Council of Gdynia.

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