Architecture, Archeology, and Construction

In 2009 the city of Gdańsk handed the site at Wałowa Street over to the Museum, and it was now possible to start preparations for the architectural competition. An architectural project should refer to a specific place: that always creates an important context for the building and its interior. The value of the land was estimated at over PLN 53 million (€12.4 million), and its donation was a great gesture of support for the Museum from the Gdańsk authorities, especially Mayor Paweł Adamowicz. From the very beginning until the dramatic epilogue, he was our ally; without him, it would have been difficult to bring the Museum to life. The land donation agreement would prove the main argument for preserving the very name of the Museum of the Second World War when, in April 2016, Minister of Culture Piotr Gliński unexpectedly announced the intention to formally liquidate our institution, name and all. Right next to the place where the Museum was to be built, there stood the building of the Polish Post Office (Poczta Polska), next to Westerplatte the most important symbol of the Polish resistance in Gdańsk in September 1939. Günter Grass made its defense and the execution of postmen known to millions of readers in *The Tin Drum*. On the other side of the Museum site, one could see the buildings, especially the tall cranes, of the Gdańsk Shipyard, as well as the European Solidarity Center being built on the former shipyard's lands. There are also plans to build a new district there—the Young City. Add to this the picturesque nature of the place—the location on the Motława and Radunia Rivers—and the immediate vicinity of the Main Town of Gdańsk, and it would be difficult to find a better place to build a new museum and attract crowds of visitors. All these considerations influenced the selection of this location.

We invited prominent architects, town planners, artists, museum specialists, and experts in the history of Gdańsk to join the jury for the architectural competition. The goal was, of course, to choose outstanding architecture that would complement the unique space of the Main Town of Gdańsk in a valuable and interesting way and not disturb its historical character. Therefore, detailed information about the exhibition content and Tempora's layout and design were part of the documentation for the architectural competition. Jack Lohman, a leading authority on world museology and at that time director of the Museum of London, oversaw the solutions proposed by architects from the point of view of the functional needs of a modern museum.

The most important voices, of course, were those of the architects assessing the value of the submitted projects, as well as the urban planners evaluating how the plans fit into the existing urban fabric and affected its development.

Daniel Libeskind, a native of Łódź and fluent in Polish, created fascinating museum buildings erected in many countries, including the Jewish Museum Berlin, the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester, the Bundeswehr Museum of Military History in Dresden, and the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada. He was later the main architect of the project to rebuild the World Trade Center space in New York and commemorate the victims of the September 11, 2001, attacks. Hans Stimmann was the main urbanist in Berlin for several years after the unification of Germany and had a decisive influence on what the city is today. Nota bene: he was criticized by many other architects for being too conservative and advocating for restoring the prewar shape of the city. British architect and urban planner George Ferguson was responsible, among other things, for the revitalization of Bristol's waterfront. Polish architects and urban planners brought, in addition to their professional skills, an in-depth knowledge of the local terrain and context. One of them, Professor Wiesław Gruszkowski, ninety years old at the time of the competition, was one of the main authors of the reconstruction of Gdańsk after 1945 and thus a great link between new and old times. A few years later, when the Museum was almost ready, he donated the Polish flag that he had hidden from the Soviets in Lviv after the invasion of the Red Army on September 17, 1939, and brought to Gdańsk after the war.

The letter inviting architects to participate in the competition was issued by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, underlining the importance of this emerging museum to Poland. He also passed on to me his request to choose a project that would guarantee world-class architecture. He believed that since the Polish state would allocate such significant sums for the construction of a museum, something of value should be created. Gdańsk deserved more than the trivial, repetitive solutions that characterize the majority of public buildings, not just in Poland but elsewhere. Over one hundred proposals from more than thirty countries were finally submitted. Many of them were very standard, placing the Museum in large square or rectangular blocks. Some referred to the types of buildings characteristic of the Main Town of Gdańsk—the work that eventually received second place proposed a building imitating the row of nearby tenement houses located by the Motława River. Others referred to the subject of war. Several proposals presented the Museum building as a ship or bunker; one envisioned it as a tank. One could also be read as a concentration camp, with wires and chimneys. Another, presented by Russian architects, placed on the roof of the building a visually dominant forest of crosses. Had this project been chosen, perhaps Metropolitan Archbishop Sławoj Leszek Głódź would have been more sympathetic to our Museum, rather than accusing us, without visiting the exhibitions (which was sadly the rule for our critics), of devoting too little attention to the martyr-

dom of the Catholic clergy. The designs can be viewed in the architectural competition catalog that we published.[7]

Of all the proposals, the vast majority of jury members from the beginning favored the one that eventually won, authored—as it turned out—by Gdynia's architectural studio Kwadrat. This project placed the most important part of the Museum, along with the permanent exhibition and the temporary exhibition galleries, underground. The Museum's exterior featured an inclined tower forty meters high, built in the shape of a prism and partially made of glass. It was one of the most daring, original, and unconventional proposals among over a hundred rated by jurors. The jurors appreciated both its originality and great functional solutions to the Museum's needs. The authors of the winning project explained that placing the exhibition underground had symbolic significance—visitors descended down into the hell of war and then climbed back to the surface, overcoming death and returning to life. From the glass tower, they could admire the panorama of the city, risen again from the destruction of war. The red color of the Museum's walls and the distant silhouette of its tower referenced the Gothic churches that dominate the historical landscape of Gdańsk. As the jurors wrote in the justification for their verdict, Kwadrat's project met all the conditions to become a sophisticated symbol, as much as Gdańsk's Armory, St. Mary's Church, and the Crane.

My euphoria after the selection of such a wonderful project, enthusiastically accepted by the vast majority of architects, was cooled by people more experienced in this matter. Daniel Libeskind warned me that until construction started, there was no guarantee that the Museum project would materialize, regardless of the enthusiasm that might accompany all earlier stages. He spoke from the experience of a long-term struggle to realize his project of the Jewish Museum Berlin, which did not enjoy the support of the city authorities. Even then, Libeskind could not have foreseen that starting construction, or even bringing it to the final stage, did not necessarily guarantee that his museum would actually open. The most important task was to get big money for the construction of the Museum, which became even more difficult after the global financial crisis began in 2008. The threat that this might affect the Polish economy became real, which further strengthened the finance minister's aversion to disbursing gigantic sums to a venture that could be postponed and perhaps even completely abandoned.

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7 Alicja Bittner et al., *Muzeum II Wojny Światowej w Gdańsku. Międzynarodowy konkurs architektoniczny* (Gdańsk: Muzeum II Wojny Światowej w Gdańsku, 2010).

However, Donald Tusk decided that the Museum would ultimately be built. I think that this was a unique decision among all the countries of the European Union, which were struggling with the crisis or fearful of its consequences and therefore limiting budgetary spending on projects that were not a priority for the economy. When confronted with that, culture, not to mention history, is usually in a weak position. Tusk's Multi-Year Government Program was decreed in January 2011; it earmarked PLN 358 million (€83.5 million) for the creation of the Museum, spread over several years. Now it was clear that we would not remain one more "virtual" museum, and soon we could start the construction.

First, however, it was necessary to carry out archeological research on a vast area of 1.7 hectares. The research lasted about a year and brought fascinating results. The work unveiled a network of streets and the outlines of houses existing since the seventeenth century that were completely destroyed in 1945 during the battles for Gdańsk. It was called Wiadrownia (Eimermacherhof) for the guilds of bucket and jug makers who settled there. It was a poor part of the city but very picturesque, located between the Motława and Radunia Rivers and sometimes called, probably with a bit of exaggeration, Gdańsk's Venice. It was an extraordinary experience to walk over the pavement of Wiadrownia's streets, uncovered after all these decades by the archeological excavations, and to compare this somewhat lunar landscape, evoking imagery of Pompeii, with prewar photographs of the district bustling with life. We transferred the pavement to the interior of the Museum and arranged an alley on the floor that crossed the entire main gallery. It accurately mimics the course of the most important street of Wiadrownia, Wielka Street (Grosse Gasse).

Thousands of items were found during the excavations, some of them even from the seventeenth century, which prompted us to prepare an additional permanent exhibition about the history of the site, titled *There Once Was Wiadrownia*. Its last section dealt with the history of the Museum of the Second World War in this place. This story was the first victim of the censorship imposed by the new museum management after I and my colleagues were removed in April 2017. Gone was the multimedia presentation on what was happening in 2016 and 2017, the aspirations of Minister of Culture Piotr Gliński to liquidate the Museum, our defense, and the protests of public opinion.

Construction started in August 2012. First, it was necessary to register and tender the contracts for the first stage of construction. It was the first of numerous tenders that we had to carry out. All of them were complicated, required huge preparations, and took a lot of time, but none of them was successfully contested or annulled, which I think was a great achievement, considering that historians directed the construction of the Museum. In the case of the European Solidarity Center or the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, investments were

carried out by specialized urban agencies in Gdańsk and Warsaw with extensive experience and professional staff. Nevertheless, we still had to create a team of lawyers and engineers. Only gradually were we becoming aware of what a monstrous and incredibly difficult task we were undertaking—it was at the time the largest investment in the field of culture in Poland and one of the largest in Europe. It was too late to retreat to the safety of research work.

The most difficult stage of construction was the first, which required the creation of a huge dry excavation or dry bathtub, as engineers called it in their jargon. It was the underground, the most important part of the Museum, where the main gallery, temporary exhibition space, conference and cinema rooms, warehouses, and parking were to be located. Engineers had to neutralize the pressure of the groundwater, which presented a bigger problem than the neighboring rivers, and also deal with clearing more boulders from the bottom of the excavation than predicted based on preconstruction surveys. During this first period, the building looked lunar: the excavation was filled with water, which stabilized its construction while the concrete side walls and base were being reinforced. Barges with specialized equipment floated on our monstrously large swimming pool, and some of the work was carried out by divers.

This part of the construction turned out to be more expensive than planned and also lasted longer. Postponed deadlines, for which we were fiercely attacked by Law and Justice politicians and right-wing commentators, stemmed not only from technical difficulties but also from a conflict with another investment underway on the neighboring plot. A new sewage collector for a large part of Gdańsk was built there with money from the European Union. After technical review, it turned out that both structures are so close to each other that continuing our work before completion of the collector could endanger its stability. Therefore, we had to stop our construction, initially only for three months. It turned out, however, that the collector construction was delayed by an additional six months; hence we lost nine months at the very beginning of our endeavor. These were not the only unexpected events affecting our schedule. In the final phase of works, there was a construction disaster in the vicinity of the Museum. During the construction of Nowa Wałowa Street, the land collapsed under the intersection, which was of critical importance to us for the delivery of building materials. For three months we had to use a detour, which slowed down the pace of work. I drew from these experiences two conclusions: first, that a great deal is being built in Poland, which sometimes leads to unexpected problems, and second, that such a project teaches humility and is burdened with unpredictable risks. Providing the opening date several years in advance, therefore, does not make any sense. Unfortunately, this knowledge came too late, which is quite natural.

It is difficult to describe what it meant to supervise the construction every day. It constantly generated thousands of problems and issues to be resolved. Each of them had, in general, its legal consequences, which had to be carefully considered, because, after all, we dealt with public funds, the use of which was subject to various restrictions. Certainly, it is easier for private investors who are not bound by public procurement or finance laws. When the main exhibition started to materialize, the challenge was to reconcile work on it with the ongoing building construction. Theoretically, everything was foreseen in the projects, but in practice solutions had to be found for many new conflicts that arose. Janusz Marszalec oversaw all this every day. I have a huge and unflagging admiration for him; he was able to take in and understand all the construction and legal complexities, and at the same time he coordinated the entire investment very well. My role was to make key decisions after listening to engineers and lawyers who repeatedly made conflicting recommendations. I realized that, in the end, I would be responsible for everything, so I was forced to venture into sundry technical and construction nuances of which, in my life up to that time, I had been blissfully ignorant.

The increase in costs was a serious problem. On one hand, the dry excavation turned out to be more expensive than expected, and on the other the situation in the construction market had changed from when we first forecasted a preliminary, comprehensive construction budget in 2009 and 2010. After a wave of bankruptcies among companies specializing in highway construction, which had won public contracts due to undervalued bids, the market cost of public tenders went up. In addition, after the most difficult phase of the financial crisis was over, there was a natural increase in wages and the prices of building materials. It affected us, because in the next tender, for completion of the construction works, we received higher bids than the Multi-Year Government Program had planned for. In this situation, assistance from the minister of culture, who guaranteed additional funds in his budget, enabled us to continue the construction. Our funding was eventually increased by PLN 90 million (€21 million). This would not have been possible without the help of Jacek Cichocki, head of the Prime Minister's Office, who, after Donald Tusk left for Brussels at the end of 2014, was our greatest supporter. Ewa Kopacz, who replaced Tusk as prime minister, did not show much interest in our Museum.

In the end, the construction of the Museum cost PLN 443 million (€103.3 million); we did not even use the entire additional sum granted to us in 2015. Construction lasted four years and five months, and we took possession of the building in January 2017. We had made very good time, if one takes into account the gigantic scale of the undertaking, especially when we subtract about a year of downtime due to the conflict with the sewer collector and the disaster at the con-

struction site of Nowa Wałowa Street. As for the costs, we were accused of being the most expensive of all the museums established to that time in Poland. This is true, but it must be remembered that it is also the largest historical museum of all that were constructed. The judgment on how well the taxpayers' money was spent belongs first and foremost to the visitors.

I can also add that the flagship project of Law and Justice, the Polish History Museum, which is being built at the Citadel in Warsaw, is budgeted to cost PLN 757 million (€176 million), which is almost twice as much as the Museum of the Second World War.[8] It is simply impossible to construct a large historical museum with modern world-class exhibitions for a much smaller amount.

8 Uchwała Zmieniająca Uchwałę w Sprawie Ustanowienia Programu Wieloletniego "Budowa Muzeum Historii Polski W Warszawie," Premier.gov.pl, March 20, 2018, www.premier.gov.pl.