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SUSTAINABLE REGENERATION THROUGH ART? ARTISTIC COLONISATION IN THE POST-SHIPYARD AREA OF GDAŃSK, POLAND

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Abstract

In Western European and North American cities, cultural functions are often deployed in the restructuring of former industrial and harbour sites. When introduced through top-down strategies aimed at domestication and revitalisation, such interventions tend to be temporary, frequently disappearing once an area becomes attractive for commercial redevelopment. In post-socialist contexts, however, the symbolic legacy of formerly collective spaces adds an additional layer that may enable the longer-term continuity of artistic activity. This paper examines the post-shipyard area in Gdańsk, Poland, tracing the induced artistic colonisation that has unfolded since 2001 and identifying factors that support the sustained, independent proliferation of cultural functions grounded in pro-common orientations. The analysis demonstrates that, through evolving adaptive strategies, emerging community-oriented initiatives have increased their capacity to anchor themselves within a rapidly transforming urban landscape.

Key words

post-industrial transformation, gentrification, cultural function, art-based regeneration, post-socialist city, Gdańsk Shipyard.

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1. Introduction

In transformation processes of post-industrial areas in Western Europe and North America, the art sector has often functioned as a trailblazer, with artists in the role of early temporary occupants. The typical sequence of events that has been observed is as follows. In a derelict industrial area, members of the art sector find affordable spaces for their activities, thereby

contributing to the regeneration of the area. The art sector is known to adapt to the local environment and to accommodate new purposes, as well as to attract new participants and spectators. Characterised by the prevalence of temporary contracts, the art sector recognises that over time, government entities, developers and banking institutions will step into the development process. In many cases, the artists are expelled, and new upmarket establishments enter. To a certain extent, the artists may be regarded as early

gentrifiers, preparing the ground for commercial use that will generate profits for subsequent users (Borup, 2015; Sacco, 2019; Hudak, 2021; Tunali 2021). As commercial developments take shape, artists are compelled to relocate due to the ending contracts and the increasing rents in new or renovated properties. However as argued by D. Trend (2022), there are differences between cities and areas regarding the nature and course of gentrification.

The terms “art-based regeneration” and “gentrification” are often used to denote the functional, spatial and social transformation of a place. This paper focuses on the accompanying process for which we use the term “artistic colonization”. It refers to the process through which artists, often regarded as cultural pioneers, enter disinvested post-industrial urban spaces and, through their creative practices, generate symbolic, social, and aesthetic transformations that render these areas newly legible, attractive, or valuable to external actors, particularly developers. While this process is commonly narrated through metaphors of discovery and revitalisation, it is important to recognise that it is never neutral. It carries inherent power asymmetries, as artists, whether intentionally or not, function as agents of spatial reconfiguration—their presence facilitates subsequent commercial redevelopment and reshapes local meanings of place. In the broader context of the restructuring of post-industrial spaces, the phenomenon of artistic colonisation is typically transient in nature.

Most of the academic research on post-industrial urban transformations has been conducted with reference to neoliberal contexts in Western Europe and North America. In the setting of former socialist cities, it can be argued that, at least in symbolic terms, the industrialised space was (a) common(s), also belonging to the workers who co-produced this space while being engaged in industrial production. This provides an additional perspective on the processes of transformation of post-industrial spaces, which, in contrast to European old-capitalist countries, have undergone formal privatisation only since the 1990s. Despite the relative scarcity of commons in Central and Eastern Europe (Toto et al., 2023) and the pronounced tensions between the city as a commodity and city as a commons paradigms in this region (Grabkowska, 2023), the symbolics of the lost collectivity still play a role in determining the future of historic grounds. This assertion is undoubtedly valid when the spatial context possesses historical and political significance, as evidenced by the Gdańsk Shipyard, which serves as a symbol of Solidarity and the 1980 strikes (Golinowska, 2021).

In the case of the former Gdańsk Shipyard, the role of artists has been interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, there have been views that emphasise full engagement with the local social environment through community-oriented and participatory arts (Sebastyański, 2006). On the other hand, there are more distanced accounts that frame the relationship between artistic “colonisers” and shipyard workers as asymmetrical and fraught (Kozik, 2018). Finally, there are views that question the suggestion that no meaningful links emerged between these groups at all (Chomicka, 2010). As this article will show, the findings of our study correspond most closely with Kozik’s assessment. While the artistic presence developed largely independently from, and often in isolation of, the shipyard workforce, several initiatives nonetheless succeeded in bridging these otherwise separate milieus, including efforts explicitly oriented toward shared goals and the production of common good.

The aim of the paper is to demonstrate whether and how the pro-common orientation became a crucial factor underpinning the long-term durability of artistic activity in the post-shipyard area over the past twenty-five years. We conceptualise the pro-common orientation as the set of practices within art-based initiatives that foster shared benefit, collective engagement, and socially inclusive governance. In the context of the former Gdańsk Shipyard, the term denotes the efforts to build reciprocal relations between artists and incumbent shipyard actors, to ensure openness and accessibility of cultural activities to wider publics, and to organise artistic spaces through participatory, socially responsible forms of management.

2. Context and Methods

The process of restructuring the former Gdansk Shipyard area provides a suitable case study for the study of artistic colonisation due to the area’s past and present symbolism, as well as its location. Located near the historical centre of Gdansk – the largest city in northern Poland of approximately half a million inhabitants, and the heart of the Tricity agglomeration – it features a waterfront and convenient access to the main communication axes within the metropolis.

The urban development of the former shipyard area began in the 1380s, when the Teutonic Order established a settlement known as Jungstadt, located just outside the northern city walls of Gdańsk (Samól, 2018). In the face of fierce competition from Gdańsk, the site was demolished in 1455. Thereafter, the

area remained uncultivated until the mid-nineteenth century, when the then Prussian Royal Shipyard (since 1872 known as the Imperial Shipyard) replaced a corvette station and repair base, followed by the establishment of the neighbouring Schichau Shipyard a few decades later.

During the Second World War these shipyards operated under the administration of the Third Reich, producing mainly submarines for the Kriegsmarine (Westphal, 2016). Following the city's capture by the Red Army in 1945, both were destroyed and looted, and in 1947—amalgamated into the Gdańsk Shipyard, which was subsequently designated with the name Lenina twenty years later.

According to the official narrative prevailing in the second half of the 20th century, the Gdańsk Shipyard was a common good of the socialist society, “built from scratch, through the efforts of the entire society and the dedicated work of shipyard workers” (Karta Stoczniozca, 1969).

The shipyard was also a city within a city, with its own health clinic, canteens, telephone exchange, and other amenities. It was a common good of the shipyard workers—a place where they spent much of their lives and a space which they produced and reproduced. In 1974, when the shipyard employed over 20,000 people, it had over 26,000 square metres of social facilities, including over 16,000 square metres of changing rooms, 6,000 square metres of bathrooms, 5,000 square metres of canteens, and modernisation plans envisaged increasing this total area by 40 per cent by 1981 (Modernizacja i rozbudowa..., 1974).

In 1980 during the strike led by the Solidarity movement, the Shipyard became a symbol of resistance against the communist state. According to G. Bakuniak and K. Nowak (1987, p. 422), following the establishment of the Interplant Strike Committee “a new collectivity emerged, one that symbolically included all the workers and, as a matter of fact, all the employees”. Even if other studies contest the inclusivity of this common identity, mainly through the critical gender perspective (Graff, 2019), this phenomenon was both unprecedented and consequential, and its reverberations continue to resonate to the present day. At the same time, despite being so renowned in the Polish recent history, the Gdańsk Shipyard, having been enclosed by brick walls and fencing, remained inaccessible to a wider public until the early 2000s.

Following the restructuring of the Gdańsk Shipyard in the 1990s, the reduced company was merged with the Gdynia Shipyard Group, and all production was moved to the island of Ostrów, located opposite the mainland premises. As a result, over 70 hectares of land were released and in 1999 transferred to a land

developer, while plans for transformation of the area into a new district, Młode Miasto (Young City)¹ were set. This district was delineated to encompass the post-shipyard grounds together with some neighbouring post-industrial areas, such as the former gasworks and the defunct electrical machinery plants (Nazewnictwo na Młodym Mieście, 2021).

The spatial development plan, formulated in 2004, provisioned a functional mix of residential and commercial edifices, in conjunction with a new transportation axis of Nowa Wałowa Street, cutting across the most attractive part of the area. Importantly, the city authorities of Gdańsk, aside from adopting the plan and securing the Nowa Wałowa, disengaged from the redevelopment process, opting instead to allow private actors to take the lead (Lorens, 2005). This withdrawal by the city is part of a broader cultural policy that has been pursued by the Gdańsk authorities, one which is based on neoliberal principles, and has been described as ‘urban entrepreneurialism’ (Borén et al., 2021).

The process of redevelopment on the outset was slow and only gathered some pace over the last decade. Since the beginning, the new landowners have involved local artists to hold temporary residencies in the old industrial edifices as a means of keeping the area occupied and setting the stage for commercial colonization. Over time, a critique of developers’ vision has arisen and gained ground (Krzymiński, 2015), especially with regard to the “dual politics of remembrance or commodification”, resulting in simultaneous ruination and redevelopment of the former shipyard grounds (Trivin, 2025). Today the site is often perceived as a lost common good by former workers and local activists who would prefer it to be redeveloped in a more participatory manner (Grabkowska, 2023).

However, the communal dimension is not all lost, as the artistic colonization reaches beyond the material aspects of gentrification. Some of the artistic activities in the former shipyard have transcended the conventional cultural projects, thereby engendering engaged art embedded in the local context. These artistic endeavours frequently engage or advocate on behalf of local communities. Some other practices are about the commoning practices and activism of artists themselves. The subsequent analysis will examine this interrelation focusing on the key hubs of artistic colonization of the Młode Miasto – from 2001 (when the first Artists’ Colony was established) to 2025 (when the Grid Arthub officially opened in 100cznia) (Figure 1).

¹ The name Młode Miasto refers to the historical Jungstadt.

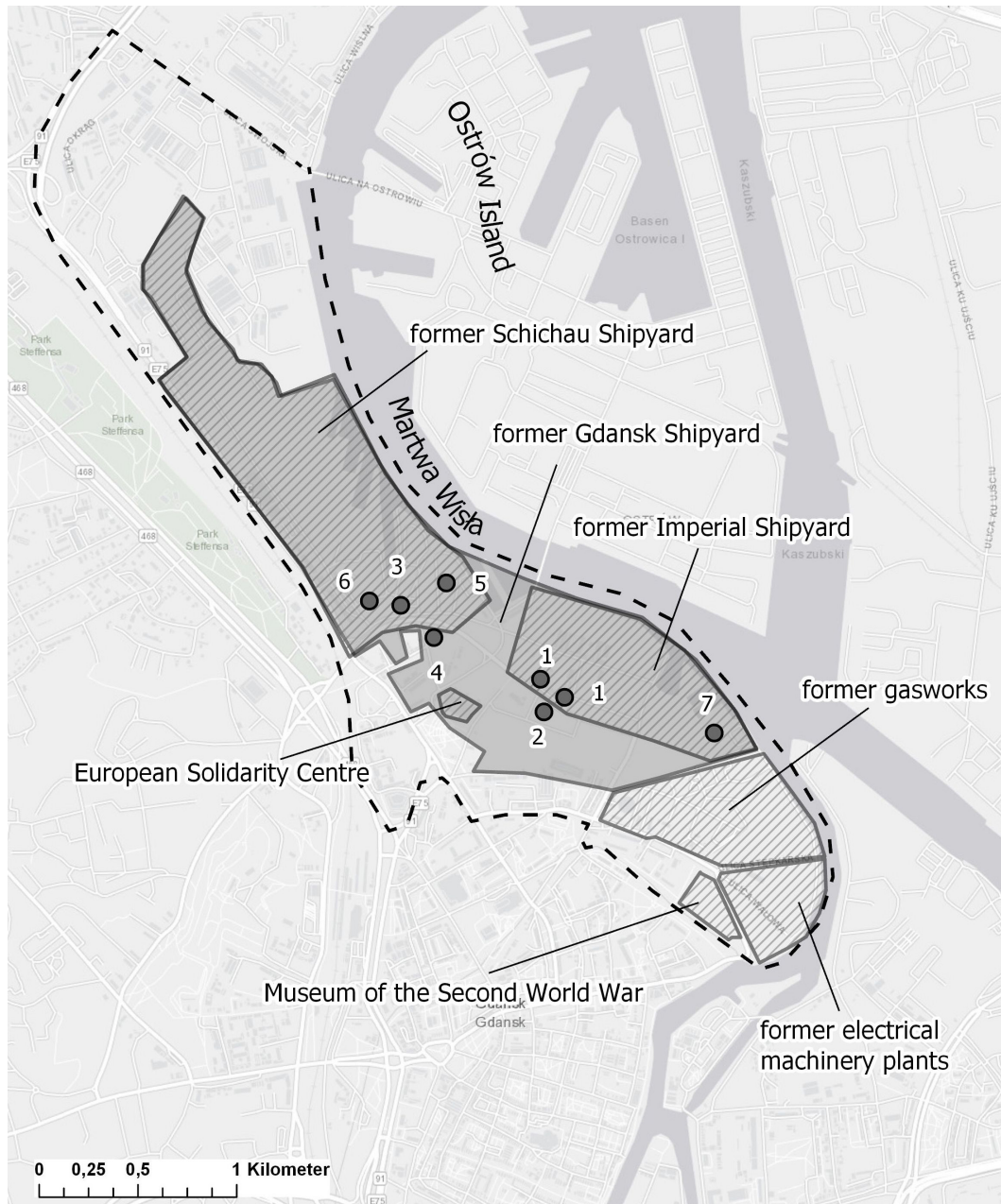


Fig. 1. Location of the analysed key clusters of artistic colonization in Młode Miasto, Gdańsk: 1- Artists' Colony, 2 – Znak Theatre, 3 – Modelarnia, 4 – Wyspa Art Institute/NOMUS, 5 – B90/Elektryków Street, 6 – 100cznia, 7 – WL4 – Mleczny Piotr.

Source: Own elaboration

The study employed a mixed-methods qualitative approach. First, we conducted extensive desk research, reviewing academic literature, monographs, project reports, and both print and digital media to establish the historical and conceptual context of the area's transformation. Second, we mapped the key clusters of past and present artistic initiatives in order to reconstruct the chronology of artistic colonisation and to identify emerging patterns of commoning practices. Third, we examined the continuities across successive waves of artistic activity and analysed the factors that have contributed to their long-term sustainability. In addition, photographic documentation was collected

to capture material evidence of continuity and change within the post-shipyard landscape. During many field visits, unstructured and informal discussions were held with people working in the area and visitors, to better understand details of the area.

3. Results and Discussion

The chronology of the process of artistic colonization of the former Shipyard Area spans over two and a half decades. The first cultural intervention in the area took place in 2000 to commemorate the 20th

anniversary of the signing of the August Agreements between the Polish government and the striking shipyard workers. The so-called Roads to Freedom art exhibition was organised in the shipyard's BHP Hall, where the August agreements were signed, along with large-scale sculptures leading up to it, made by artist Grzegorz Kłaman using typical shipbuilding work practices (Photo 1). In the subsequent year, the developer initiated an invitation scheme for art collectives, offering them access to spaces at no or low cost for an indefinite period. Artists could rent studio space free of charge, with only running costs of energy and water consumption for the artist tenants.

Over the years some of the initiatives transformed and/or migrated within the post-shipyard premises, other either stayed in place or discontinued. Table 1 presents an overview through time of the most significant artistic activities, and their pro-common initiatives.

The first resident-artists hub, called Artists' Colony (Kolonія Artystów) was located in the building of the former telephone exchange, adjacent to the Shipyard Management headquarters. It soon emerged as an informal, bottom-up artistic community whose members—mostly young artists seeking studio space—collectively shaped a shared lifestyle and creative environment.

The residents lived and worked side by side, cultivating a communal ethos built on mutual inspiration, spontaneous collaboration, and the blurring of boundaries between home, studio, and social space (Knera, 2017). Operating outside formal institutional structures, Artists' Colony fostered a vibrant, self-organised creative milieu that contrasted sharply with more bureaucratised art organisations on the one hand and the industrial routines of the surrounding area on the other.

Among the numerous activities of the Artists' Colony, the Mm Gallery was known for its promotion of emerging artists, often still students at the local Academy of Fine Arts. Furthermore, artists have been known to take independent action in various locations in the post-shipyard grounds, as evidenced by Iwona Zając 2004 mural creation on the shipyard wall. This mural, described as a 'transcription of the «oral history» of the shipyard as told by the direct witnesses of certain events' (Błotnicka-Mazur, 2021, p. 435), serves as a prime example of artistic engagement with the redevelopment process. The wall, and thereby the mural, were demolished in 2013, to make space for the construction of a new road. This dismantling can be thus interpreted as a symbolic representation of the transformation of the former shipyard's urban landscape.



Photo 1. One of Grzegorz Kłaman's installations from the Gates series, currently relocated from its original location to a more peripheral one (February 2023).

Source: Peter Nientied

Tab. 1. Chronology of the key manifestations of artistic colonization of the former Gdansk Shipyard grounds

Name	Duration	Types of artistic activity	Major events/achievements	Pro-common initiatives	Continuation	
					in the premises	else-where
Artists' Colony	2001-2012	visual arts, music performance and recording, performance art, gallery exhibitions, art workshops, art festivals, collaborative creative projects	Mm Gallery	Shipyard mural (I. Zając, 2004) complimentary educational and artistic workshops for workers' children	Yes	Yes
Znak Theatre	2002-2008	theatre production and performance, artistic and creative workshops, artist residencies	Play premieres: Ulica Długa (2002), babilon.pl (2003), Dziady – ćwiczenia (2004)	Neighbours to Neighbours Festival (2013)	No	Yes
Modelarnia	2002-2012	exhibitions, concerts, meetings, performance art shows		Subjective Bus Line	No	No
Wyspa Art Institute / Nomus	2004-2016, 2018-onwards	art exhibitions, community workshops, film screenings, live events, discussions and concerts	International Arts Festival Alternativa (2011-2016)	Friends from the Seaside community space (workshop and study area with library, café, kids' corner, bookstore)	Yes	No
B90 / Ulica Elektryków	2013-onwards	concerts, festivals and other (alternative) music events	Soundrive Festival (2013-onwards), Mystic Festival (2022-onwards)		Yes	No
100cznia / Grid Arthub	2017-onwards	concerts, visual art/exhibitions, open-air cinema screenings, workshops & educational activities, performative / urban art events	Patio (2017), Grid Arthub (2025)	Free-of-charge use of space for NGOs and social initiatives addressing issues of ecology, migration and social exclusion	Yes	No
WL4 - Mleczny Piotr	2018-onwards	artists' studios (sculpture, visual arts, Ceramics, textile art, multimedia), performance, lectures/talks, socially engaged art, workshops	blacksmith festival Koval Fest (2024), multi-disciplinary performance: „Istota Rzeczy” (2025)		Yes	No

Source: Own elaboration based on desk research.

In 2008, the Artists' Colony moved to the renovated former headquarters of the Gdańsk Shipyard management (Photo 2), and in 2012 it ceased its operations. Later in November the same year, during a two-day Narracje Festival taking place in the former Shipyard, the old set-up was recreated by former residents as part of the closing event in the form of retrospective exhibition/performance "Telephone Exchange/The Former Artists' Colony" (Kozik, 2018).

Since 2012, some artists have remained in scattered studios in the post-shipyard areas, such as the Changing Room Building and the neighbouring Hall 49a (Photo 3), while others have moved to other locations in Gdańsk. For instance, the co-founder of the PGR-Art collective, which constituted the core of the Artists' Colony, currently operates 'a hybrid of a contemporary art gallery, an audio space, a café and a co-working space' called Kolonia in Wrzeszcz (Kolonia, n.d.).

The second place colonised was by the artists of the **Znak Theatre Association**. The theatre group which had been in operation since 1992, assumed the management of the former villa of the Director of the Imperial Shipyard in 2002. Over the following year, the previously derelict building was renovated and adapted by the new tenants for artistic purposes, including the establishment of a theatre hall, workshop facilities, and accommodation spaces for participants as part of European Centre for Creative Integration (Teatr Znak, 2013). The venue also became a meeting place for independent culture, and hosted a range of resident artists—musicians, painters, photographers, and others—collaborating with the association across various art forms.

The Znak Theatre operated in the shipyard area until 2008 and now continues its activities in Gdańsk Wrzeszcz. In 2013, the European Centre for Creative Integration of the Znak Theatre, the Artists' Colony and other artists from the area, the Inter-Enterprise



Photo 2. Entrance to the renovated building of the former Gdańsk Shipyard management (February 2023).
Source: Peter Nientied



Photo 3. The now defunct shared art studio of Kolektyw Pogoda (Weather Collective) in Hall 49a (February 2023).
Source: Peter Nientied

Commission of the “Solidarity” trade union, and the Shipyard itself jointly organized a non-commercial festival titled “Neighbours for Neighbours.” The event, dedicated to shipyard workers and their families, aimed to showcase the creative work of young artists active in Młode Miasto.

In 2002, the same year as Znak’s establishment, **Modelarnia** was launched, when artists associated with the nomadic gallery Wyspa (Island), previously active in historic city centre, moved into the former Model Workshop Building. Despite the fact that the venue was oriented towards cultural events that were primarily intended for artistic circles and audiences, during the years of Modelarnia’s activity, its founder Grzegorz Kłaman realised the Subjective Bus Line project. In this project, visitors were able to tour the shipyard on board an old bus, guided by former Shipyard employees, who talked about their former workplace (Pruszyńska, 2011).

Modelarnia closed in 2012 when the Model Workshop building was demolished.

Wyspa Art Institute, founded by the Wyspa Progress Foundation and originated from the same independent art collective as Modelarnia, moved in 2004 into the former workshops of the Shipbuilding School. Since then, it functioned as a hybrid institution – a research, exhibition, and educational space, focusing on contemporary art, critical reflection, and discourse rather than being a traditional gallery. Over time, it developed an intellectual infrastructure encompassing archives, a reading room, a publishing house, and a residency program for international artists and theorists. Its programme engaged with the history of post-shipyard Gdańsk, linking independent artistic movements in Gdańsk to broader social, political, and cultural transformations (Wroniszewski, 2022). Following conflicts between co-founders, the Institute was forced to vacate its premises in 2016 as the building was acquired by the city of Gdańsk. The aim of this acquisition was to establish **NOMUS (New Art Museum)**, a contemporary branch of the National Museum in Gdańsk. It opened in October 2021 and until 2022 was managed by Aneta Szytak, former head of ISW, who authored the museum’s programme manifesto. The latter defines NOMUS as ‘a space for participation’ and ‘a repository of knowledge’, ‘facilitating equal opportunities for access to culture, democracy and openness’ and regards the community as ‘the foundation upon which the museum is constructed’ (Szytak, n.d.).

B90 occupied the former Electrical Engineering Department Hall in 2013, initially as a music club with the flagship event of the Soundrive festival of alternative music, which has been organized annually

until this day. B90 expanded and encompassed neighbouring buildings, and since 2016 the complex has been running an event and dining venue named Ulica Elektryków (Electricians’ Street). It comprises, among others, the alternative club Drizzly Grizzly (2018), the Plenum art gallery (2019), W4 Food Squad food court and Plener 33 space for relaxation (2022) (Szczypior, n.d.).

The co-founders of **100cznia**, established in 2017 under a 10-year lease agreement with a developer, underscore the community spirit of the location by virtue of its self-designation as a ‘city within a city’ (Nasza misja, n.d.). It began with a pop-up music stage combined with several bars in an outdoor space arranged with shipping containers, the so-called Patio. Once a venue open only during the summer season, 100cznia soon incorporated a neighbouring buildings and space in between them - **INSIDE** (a bar and indoor space for events), **OUTSIDE** (another outdoor music stage), the **Layup Gallery** – dedicated to graffiti and street art, and **Thirdspace** - a combination of a skatepark, a basketball court and a beach with artificial sand and deckchairs, overlooking the shipyard cranes. The newest addition, building 31b (a former shipyard canteen), hosts a vegetarian restaurant **Dust Kitchen**, a club café and bar **Plot Social Club**, and the centre for artistic and cultural activities, **Grid Arthub**.

Grid Arthub to some extent resembles the first Artists’ Colony, as it features a combination of a large open space for meetings with offices and artists’ studios (both established and those at the beginning of their careers – students of the Academy of Fine Arts). In a recent interview, one of the co-founders explained the guiding philosophy behind the selection of tenants as one which emphasizes creating an affordable, stable, and safe workspace where tenants feel secure and empowered, rather than trapped in the insecurity and temporariness typical of commercial coworking spaces (Stankiewicz, 2025, p. 20).

WL4 - Mleczny Piotr – an independent gallery and collective of artist studios was transplanted to the former shipyard premises from a nearby former bakery building in Wiosny Ludów street, just outside the shipyard premises. The Mleczny Piotr takes its name from the historical Milchpeter Inn opened in 1692, over one and a half century before the first shipyard was established in these grounds (Śliwiński, n.d.). Since WL4’s establishment in 2018, it has become a landmark of independent, self-sustaining cultural production on a post-industrial site, combining studio community, public performance, socially engaged exhibitions, and large-scale art in a historically and architecturally meaningful location (Photo 4).



Photo 4. Sculptures composed of materials sourced from the shipyard emerging from the former dry dock at Mleczny Piotr, with the backdrop of Ostrów Island (February 2023).

Source: Peter Nientied

The enumerated hotbeds of artistic activity are physically prominent, but they do not comprise the entire corpus of artistic and cultural initiatives. Some significant temporary or footloose activities include a photo documentation of demolition of shipyard buildings (Szlaga, 2021), a series of Women's Walks along the Gdańsk Shipyard grounds as part of the *Metropolitanka* project (Miler, 2019), a community garden *Plony* (*Plony Ogród Społeczny*, 2021) and the *Memory of Water* workshops (Zakrzewska-Duda, 2020). Furthermore, since 2012, artists active in the former shipyard area have been represented on the Young City Stakeholders' Board, which is an advisory and consultative body that brings together landowners, investors, cultural actors, urban activists, and public institutions to shape the vision, development, and programming of *Młode Miasto* (Kosmala, Sebastyanski, 2013).

From the description of the key actors of art-led regeneration of the former shipyard area, it is clear that the processes of artists' occupation and vacation have been dynamic, erratic even. Some artists changed their location several times, while others left the premises for good. This is not surprising as from a business point of view such ventures are usually high-risk regarding operations and context. Artistic hubs emerge, expand or stop depending on economic, organisational and socio-cultural

factors, often interlinked, such as funding, level of institutionalisation and support from the community.

The availability of financial resources is a fundamental condition for sustainability. For instance, steady public funding is and will be the *sine qua non* for the operation of NOMUS. However, economic factors also include economies of scale and diversification. Initiatives containing activities for a larger public are more likely to survive, whereas budding and economically struggling artists may be forced to move out. Likewise, initiatives with diversified income generation, such as *Ulica Elektryków* or *100cznia*, have a bigger chance for continuation than those with more modest portfolios.

The organisational issues refer mostly to the level of institutionalisation. In general, the higher this level is, the more stable the enterprise, even at the cost of flexibility. In her paper, A. Kozik (2018) juxtaposes the Artists' Colony—and its fragmented, underfunded and rather ad-hoc activities—with the highly institutionalized Wyspa Art Institute, concluding that the former had a relative weaker position than the latter, which weighed on its liveability. In a similar vein, transformation of the Wyspa Art Institute into NOMUS secured its place in *Młode Miasto* even further.

Finally, the community dimension occurred to be vital, even if sometimes underplayed in the media or academic accounts owing to the inherent challenges

associated with quantifying such phenomena. In an interview being one of the exceptions, the co-founder of 100cznia points out that, in addition to financial and organisational matters, the cultivation of interpersonal relationships and the resolution of internal divisions within the art community are pivotal factors in the long-term sustainability of artistic spaces in post-industrial grounds (Stankiewicz, 2025). She also draws attention to a significant discrepancy between institutional and grassroots initiatives – while the former are designed to address the needs of a specific community (or individuals), the latter are developed in collaboration with the community.

This last group of conditions pertains the most to the commoning aspects of artistic colonisation of Młode Miasto. Whilst it could be argued that the majority of artists did not necessarily aspire to transcend the realm of artmaking and reclaim the lost communal dimension of space, this outcome emerged as a natural by-product of their presence and activities. Even though it was not a prevalent practice for artists to engage with former shipyard workers and their families, nor with the local community, the occasional initiatives in this regard had a relatively significant impact. Furthermore, many artists established their own communities amongst their peers, whilst also reaching a diverse wider audience through pro-common initiatives.

A pro-common orientation, though less explicitly articulated, is also evident in both the economic and organisational dimensions. Economically, the long-standing projects tend to operate on hybrid models in which commercial activities partially subsidise non-commercial, community-oriented functions, enabling their continued existence. Organisationally, this orientation emerges in efforts toward co-creation, participatory forms of management, and a socially responsible approach to running these spaces.

4. Conclusions

The regeneration of post-industrial areas is typically a long and dynamic process. It is therefore difficult to determine the precise stage a given site has reached, what happens with the artistic ventures and to anticipate when further large-scale commercial development will occur, or to assess the pressures such transformations may place on existing communities. As a result, evaluating the potential eventual outcomes of art-based regeneration is inherently challenging.

Nevertheless, by observing its trajectory over time, it becomes possible to assess the direction of change and the extent to which it reflects pro- or counter-

community orientations. In the case of Młode Miasto, although the initial development plan was prepared in 2004, discussions about the future of the district are still ongoing. However, art-based initiatives have gradually established a stable presence, as demonstrated by the chronology of interventions in the area. Artistic colonisation in Młode Miasto began on a small and fragmented scale and later expanded into more structured and visible activities, including festivals and large public events that attract broad audiences. Currently the area is a very well-known cultural hub².

This research shows that the former Shipyard provided entrepreneurial and independent artists with favourable spatial, physical, and social conditions for settling and developing (joint) initiatives. The factors shaping the success of these initiatives can be grouped into three overarching categories: economic, organisational, and socio-cultural.

The socio-cultural dimension is where a pro-common orientation becomes most evident. It includes the relationships between newcomers (artists) and incumbent actors (shipyard workers and the shipyard's institutional environment), the accessibility and openness of activities to external publics, and the organisational approaches adopted within the artistic clusters themselves. Although artistic activity in the former Gdańsk Shipyard largely developed independently of—and often parallel to—the daily life of shipyard workers, several initiatives nonetheless succeeded in creating meaningful connections between these otherwise separate worlds. These efforts, oriented toward shared goals and the production of common good, ranged from modest undertakings such as communal gardens to large-scale public events. Such forms of pro-common practices are particularly significant given the limited involvement of key public actors, including the municipal authorities.

At the same time, the intangible nature of the pro-common dimension means that the extent to which the former Shipyard's symbolic legacy as a collective space contributes to the long-term continuity of artistic activity may seem relatively modest. What can be confirmed, however, is that community-oriented initiatives have strengthened their capacity to anchor themselves in the area—particularly by attracting increasingly large audiences. These developments unfold within a broader Polish neoliberal political context, where commons-oriented approaches receive little institutional support and private-sector urban development is strongly favoured.

² Former mayor of Gdańsk Paweł Adamowicz called the area a 'new cultural district' of the city (Trivin, 2025).

As new generations with weaker ties to the Shipyard's past take part in the city's cultural life, the collective memory embedded in this space may gradually diminish.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the case of Młode Miasto offers a nuanced answer to the question of whether art can contribute to sustainable regeneration. While artistic initiatives have not fundamentally reversed the market-driven dynamics shaping the area's redevelopment, they have generated forms of social, cultural, and spatial embeddedness that exhibit some degree of durability. Their longevity rests less on formal institutional support than on adaptive organisational practices, hybrid economic models, and pro-common orientations that cultivate local attachment and broaden public engagement. In this sense, the sustainability of regeneration through art remains contingent and partial, yet nonetheless tangible: it resides not in stabilised structures or

guaranteed futures, but in the continuing capacity of artistic actors to negotiate space, foster communal practices, and maintain cultural presence within an environment subject to constant change.

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