

## POLAND

### Military heritage places at risk

#### Introduction

Poland is very interesting for its variety of different fortifications. It is connected with our history full of battles and preparation against different invasions. This was caused by the geographical location of Poland in Europe, on the lowland between the Atlantic Ocean and the Ural Mountains. These geo-historical factors are the reasons that the art of fortification developed in Poland through time.

It is possible to study the characteristic elements of different types of fortification in Poland – the medieval, Renaissance and modern. Polish defence architecture is characteristic of various schools of fortifications, such as the Italian, Dutch, French, Polish, Prussian, Russian, Austrian, German and Soviet systems. That all these different types of fortresses are found in the area of one country is unique in Europe.

The Polish State Heritage Conservation body also pays attention to fortifications. The most recent heritage legislation of July 2003 mentions defence structures as a new category. In so doing, one of its most important threats disappeared. This parliamentary decision is very important for the future preservation and restoration of this type of heritage.

There are many types of defence structures under Polish State protection. From a total of 60,042 declared cultural heritage places, 1173 are listed as fortifications. Of these, 829 are medieval and 344 are more modern fortifications (from 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). Of these latter, 33 date to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There is a wide range in scale among these fortifications, including large defensive areas of the 19<sup>th</sup> century fortification systems and very small structures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, such as World War II shelters.

The most significant in Poland are modern fortresses from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century built by the invaders of Poland, Russia, Austria and Prussia. The characteristic features of this type of heritage are the large fortified areas with individual cores of masked forts consisting of rings, concealed roads and different types of green spaces.

There are also very interesting Polish, German and Soviet 20<sup>th</sup> century military systems connected with World War II, and built during the Cold War under the Warsaw Pact. Again, it is very rare for European countries to have so many examples of 20<sup>th</sup> century defence systems. These structures have become more interesting not only to scientific research but also as tourist attractions since the 1989 political changes in Poland and since Poland joined NATO in 1999.

The number of identified fortifications has increased during the last few years. It is connected with the ongoing process of change and rationalisation that is taking place in our army. After joining NATO, the Polish military forces have been reorganised and reduced. For this reason, many former camps and some training fields are redundant. Secret features lose their special military value and are being opened up. They have not been renovated or rebuilt but simply left alone. It is difficult to find new functions for these heritage sites. Because of this, defence structures are finally destroyed. Some of the historic fortifications, which were army property for many years, are now in State or municipal ownership, some of them are privately owned. Many, because of their previous clandestine character, are not listed in the heritage register; their legal protection is more difficult.

Fortifications were already identified as threatened in the Polish report of the 2000 *ICOMOS World Report on Monuments and Sites in Danger*. The situation has not changed very much since then. Defence heritage is still in danger in Poland.

#### Causes of risk

Threats to military cultural heritage places are caused by many factors. The reasons for being at risk vary. Most of them are connected to legislation, management problems and education.

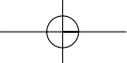
#### Legislation issues

Incompleteness of the heritage registration of defence structures for many reasons:

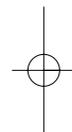
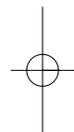
- A lack of knowledge of the full defence resources,
- Incorrect entries in register decisions,
- Ongoing use by the Polish military forces, in regard to the secret nature of some military cultural heritage place,
- A lack of monitoring, control and insufficient legal provision for reuse and reconstruction,
- Property legislation problems.

#### Use and maintenance problems

- A lack of political will and the mismanagement of conservation by authorities, both central and local;
- A lack of interest, civic initiative and care on behalf of local communities;
- Long-term non-use of defence structures, causing a lack of maintenance and lack of heating, resulting in the deterioration of the site;
- Difficulties in finding new functions for redundant military cultural heritage places;
- Conflict between the new use and original function;
- Threats created as a consequence of modernisation as well as the change in ownership of military cultural heritage places;
- Inappropriate use by the owners, lack of proper maintenance, insufficient or inadequate maintenance;
- Neglect of routine repairs;
- The large costs of maintenance, adaptations and conservation works at the fort, which are very often much greater than at other heritage sites;
- A lack of sufficient conservation funds, both government budgets and private funds;
- A lack of funds to manage and maintain spatially very large military structures and fortifications;
- A lack of funds for capital repairs and even routine repairs;
- Errors committed during renovation and restoration work;
- Risk from natural disasters due to atmospheric effects, vegetation and human factors. The most destructive to the earth, brick and stone structures is water erosion and uncontrolled vegetation growth and expansion;
- The transfer of military cultural heritage places from the Department of National Defence, caused by losing their strategic values, resulting in a lack of management for these sites;

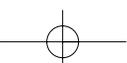


Vistulamouth Fortress in Gdansk is a unique example of the coastal defensive architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries



Vistulamouth Fortress in Gdansk, view to the still existing "Siarkopol", the area of gathering sulphur, which is the cause for a strong presence of sulphuric dust

Vistulamouth Fortress in Gdansk, view on to the damages of the bastion's bricks caused by water



- New cadastral divisions for new owners of the historic military properties that cause a deterioration of their significance;
- Looting of the original armour-plated defence parts to seal them as salvage and, in smaller scale, bricks robbing for cheap building materials;
- Vandalism;
- A lack of structural assistance programs dedicated to preparing management plans and restoring military cultural heritage places;
- The threat of possible military use of significant historic forts during military conflicts.

### **Research and education**

- Insufficient knowledge of the scientific, historic and artistic values of military cultural heritage places and fortifications;
- A lack of education and awareness by individuals of the heritage values of fortifications and their preservation;
- A lack of understanding of the need to protect 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century fortresses built by the invaders of Poland, Russia, Austria and Prussia, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union;
- The lack of a complete effective inventory;
- Secrecy of some military cultural heritage places which makes research impossible;
- The lack of research programs;
- The lack of a strategic approach to heritage conservation management;
- Insufficient specialist training;
- The lack of recognition of 20<sup>th</sup> century forts, particularly post-World War II, built during the Cold War and under the Warsaw Treaty.



Vistulamouth Fortress in Gdansk, the brick bastions in need of conservation work

### **Emerging solutions**

Activities connected with the protection of military cultural heritage places could vary because of the different risks. Work should focus on legislation problems, education and research, inventories, and appropriate use and maintenance, and developing protocols for the transfer of ownership and management of the military cultural heritage places which are redundant to the military.

The most important activities are:

- The verification of heritage registers regarding their accuracy, especially of the boundaries of legally protected areas;
- The compilation of fortifications and the military cultural heritage resources on the heritage register;
- Include defence landscapes in legally protected items because of cultural and natural values in such landscapes. Because of their particular character fortress landscapes could be treated as a prototype for the integrated protection of cultural and natural values;
- Include provincial conservators in the process of transfer of secret military cultural heritage places, which are redundant to the army;
- Education on different levels about the range of heritage values, preservation and management of historic forts and military cultural heritage places;
- Include the problems of the conservation and management of fortifications and military cultural places in national, regional and local strategies.

Vistulamouth Fortress in Gdansk, conservation of the earthworks on the bastions





Swinoujscie, 19th-century Prussian fort "Saint Angel"

## Examples of activities

### *'Conservation and development of defence structures' - conservation program of the Ministry of Culture*

Numerous activities have been undertaken to study, plan and launch a revival process for Polish fortifications. The Ministry of Culture provided a special program for the identification and preservation of historic fortresses in 1997–1999, which was administered by the Fortification Society. As a result of this program, many new items and fortified areas have been investigated and some of them have been entered in the heritage register. A few conservation and management projects have been established. They are connected with 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century fortresses in Kostrzyn, Klodzko, Srebrna Gora, 19<sup>th</sup> century Prussian fortifications, such as the Boyen fortress in Gizycko, fortifications of Torun, Poznan, Russian fortifications in Modlin, Osowiec and Deblin, the Austrian fortresses in Krakow and Przemysl and 20<sup>th</sup> century Polish, Soviet and German military defence areas of Hel, the Biebrza wetlands and the Festungsfront of Oder-Warther-Bogen.

### *The Vistulamouth Fortress in Gdansk*

The revitalisation of a fortress requires significant technical and financial resources, which is very difficult to obtain. One of the possibilities is to find money for restoration from different private or government funds. This was achieved by the Gdansk History for the renovation of the Vistulamouth Fortress, which is a branch of the museum. Assistance came from the World Monuments Fund, which inscribed the Vistulamouth Fortress in Gdansk, one of the most significant fortresses in Poland, in the World Monuments Watch List of 100 Most Endangered Sites, being listed in 1996, 1998 and again in 2000.

The Vistulamouth Fortress in Gdansk is a unique example of coastal defence architecture of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries with legible layers of the following fortification systems. The first brickwork fortification in Vistulamouth was built at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was a brick tower known as the Lighthouse which acted as a traditional guardhouse and lighthouse. This fortification was rebuilt in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when a powerful brick three-floor bastion with casemates for heavy guns was erected round the Lighthouse, and a four-bastion brick and earthwork fortress was built. Works continued in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the right river bank fortifications of the fortress were shielded by the earthen five-bastion Eastern Bulwark and then a smaller Western Bulwark was constructed on the left bank of the Vistula river. Work on the Vistulamouth Fortress fortifications continued in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the stone shelters were constructed. The fortress lost its military importance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it was partially damaged. The Vistulamouth Fortress was not used after World War II because of serious obstacles. One was atmospheric pollution at the site caused by Gdansk Phosphorous Fertilizer Plant and the strong presence of sulphuric dust caused by 'Siaropol'. The second obstacle is the partition of the site between the Treasury and the local councils. The World Monuments Fund nomination helped to obtain financial support for the Vistulamouth Fortress protection, for a pilot conservation project on the Artillery Bastion at the fortress and for initial restoration work.

Pomiechówek, 19th-century Russian fort, one of the Modlin stronghold military objects, still used by the army



## Directions for activity

The significance of historic defence systems and fortress landscapes has become more accepted in Poland. They are beginning to be treated as a shared European heritage. There are, however, still many problems regarding their proper preservation and management, noting that many significant fortresses have still not been renovated. Problems relate to the large size of military areas, the

lack of management or bad management, result from today's restructure of the Polish army, legal imperfections and the deficiency of our education, as well as various other reasons. These problems have to be solved quickly if we want to keep fortresses in Poland for future generations and find new uses related to culture, education and tourism. The same, or very similar problems occur in various other countries, not only in Europe but also around the world.

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Schleswig Holstein Battery on Hel Peninsula, an example of a German military structure from World War II



Jastarnia, an example of a Polish shelter from 1939 on Hel Peninsula

Buszno, west-Poland, example of a Soviet military structure from the Cold War



Brzeznicza, near Borne Sulinowo, example of a Soviet military structure for missiles from the Cold War



## Wildenbruch Palace, Swobnica

If a building is no longer used adequately and lacks necessary maintenance, it will fall into disrepair very quickly. An example is Wildenbruch Palace in Swobnica, which survived World War II undamaged, but is now seriously at risk. The Palace, that belonged to the Margravate of Brandenburg-Schwedt, was built from 1680 by the Prussian Electress Dorothea, second wife of the Great Elector. Its central projection originally was crowned by a pediment, and the palace integrated the round tower as well as other parts of the original medieval castle of the Order of St John. It is likely that the architect was the Dutchman Cornelis Rijkwaert, who worked in North Germany in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and also built the Electress' residence in nearby Schwedt on the other side of the river Oder.

Many buildings by Rijkwaert, who was also the architect of Oranienbaum Palace near Dessau, were destroyed after 1945, for instance the palaces in Schwedt and Hohenfinow-an-der-Oder. In all the rooms of the three-storeyed Wildenbruch Palace, richly ornamented stucco ceilings can be found, though these are mostly in a deplorable state. These ceilings are presumed to be the work of Giovanni Battista, Jean Bellon and Giovanni Simonetti, all three stucco artists who also worked in another building by Rijkwaert, the recently restored Junkerhaus in Frankfurt-an-der-Oder.

The side wings of Wildenbruch Palace were subsequently added to the *corps de logis* by Johann Friedrich Nering. He was the chief architect for the Great Elector and worked for the Electress after Rijkwaert's death.

We can only hope that reporting on this forgotten example of European architectural history in this edition of *Heritage at Risk* will result in an initiative to save this outstanding building.



Klaus Merten

Wildenbruch Palace, interior with stucco work

Wildenbruch Palace in Swobnica

