# EMIGRATION POINT IN GDYNIA, POLAND

## A 1928 Modern Passenger Terminal with Top-Tier Hygiene Standards

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**ABSTRACT:** Traveling during an epidemic can be challenging both for people and for the design of suitable infrastructures. In the late 19th century, as knowledge about infectious diseases spread, hygienic conditions and inspections became mandatory, especially in places of passenger traffic. This led to the need for specific adaptations in the existing infrastructure of such places. However, the port of Gdynia, which the Republic of Poland decided to build in 1922 on the southern coast of the Baltic Sea shortly after the country regained independence, was an entirely different case. During the 1920s and 1930s, Gdynia served as a significant travel hub for passengers traveling between Central Europe and America. This period also witnessed the rise of modern design methods in the development of the city and its port. The entire port infrastructure was built from the ground up, allowing for the implementation of the latest and most advanced solutions. The article presents research on a building complex in Gdynia called the Emigration Point. The study aims to analyze the design guidelines for the modern interior and the design itself to recreate the path a guest of the Emigration Point would take, from arrival to leaving the complex. The complex was designed to minimize the risk of infection and the development of potential diseases among emigrants. The research involved detailed historical analyses using primary source studies, such as project drawings and original documentation. This method was complemented with digital tools to reconstruct buildings or architectural spaces that have been significantly altered or no longer exist. The study also investigates the impact of the Modern Movement's assumptions on the project's conditions, including the complex layout, pavilion designs, functional and spatial principles, materials, the interior, and equipment. Additionally, it raises questions about the validity of the solutions proposed at the time, how they relate to current threats, and what we can learn from them.

**KEYWORDS:** Architecture history, modern interiors, hotel-sanitary complex, disinfection infrastructure, Emigration Point, Gdynia

**INTRODUCTION:** The 19th century brought forth the innovations of railway transport and trans-oceanic passenger shipping, which allowed to relieve, through migration, the overpopulation in certain regions of the world, but at the same time, significantly increased the spread of infectious diseases (Stern & Markel, 2004). These, in turn, were influenced by lower resistance to infections due to predominantly poor living conditions, low levels of hygiene, and insufficient medical care. This condition affected a significant part of the population living in Europe (Berner, 2000). Given that tuberculosis, cholera, smallpox, pneumonia, diphtheria, and even typhus, plague, and yellow fever were still taking a heavy toll at the beginning of the 20th century, transit cities and means of transport associated with collective migration were particularly at risk of epidemic outbreaks. It was feared by the authorities of emigration destination countries, such as the United States, Canada, and others in South America, as well as cities on the main migration routes.

The health status of migrants was considered an important aspect at a time when migration movements in Europe increased rapidly, mainly due to fear of epidemics spreading to permanent residents. It was only in the mid-19th century that health and hygiene inspections began to be carried out on the main European mass migration routes and communication hubs. After the end of the 19th century,

01 Emigrants waiting beside the so-called Blaszak in Port of Gdynia, 1928 — a makeshift corrugated metal warehouse temporarily serving as a passenger terminal. The scene reflects the inadequate infrastructure and harsh conditions faced by travelers during the early stages of the port's construction. © The National Digital Archives, 2023.

individual organizers and migration agents also began to care about the health and safety of people embarking on a journey, taking into account their well-being and not only their economic considerations. The largest ports in Great Britain (Hull, Bristol, London, Liverpool) and continental Europe (Le Havre, Antwerp, Rotterdam, Bremen, Hamburg, Genoa, Naples) began to organize specialized infrastructure to handle migrants. The German ports of Bremen and later Bremerhaven were best prepared to provide these services (Walaszek, 2018), an example of which was the German Emigration Center [Deutsches Auswandererhaus] opened in 1849 on the site of the former Karlsburg fortress. It was designed in the spirit of neo-gothic style by renowned Bremen architect Heinrich Müller (1819-1890). There was accommodation in dormitories and single rooms for 2,000 migrants who, while waiting for embarkation, could have meals (the kitchen served 3,500 a day) and undergo hygiene treatments and medical examinations. While meeting higher standards than the average emigrant lodging house at the time, the lodging house did not adhere to later rules of separating traffic inside the facility and dividing the 'clean' side from the 'dirty.' Still, the importance of sanitary considerations was continuously downplayed, which led to serious epidemiological crises in the cities of migrants' transit and ports where they boarded the ships. Adam Walczak, a specialist in the field of migration in the modern era, states that it was only during the outbreak of the dramatic cholera epidemic in the hot summer of 1892 in Hamburg that authorities began to tighten controls on emigrants from Europe heading towards the United States and Canada (Walaszek, 2018). After the disease was brought in by emigrants from distant Russia, over 8,500 people died in the city, and a total of nearly 20,000 became ill.

With the development of medical science and, as Stern and Markel (2004) note, the increasingly widespread acceptance of the germ theory of infectious diseases, new regulations began to be introduced. The first convention of the International Sanitary Conference, which introduced mandatory sanitary inspections and quarantine for ships arriving from affected areas, as well as established procedures for the international exchange of epidemiological information, was held in Venice in 1892. It was a breakthrough in changing the way we think about the sanitary conditions of port infrastructure and buildings. Its resolutions linked port conditions with measures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases. The same year, Ellis Island's immigrant inspection station was opened in New York Harbor, requiring strict verification and control for immigrants. Reasons for refusal included the diagnosis of infectious diseases and improper journey preparation.

In the lands of the Republic of Poland, the most spontaneous migration movements that affected the Polish population occurred during the partitions (1795-1918). However, phenomena such as overpopulation of rural areas, urban unemployment, and an insufficiently developed industry occurred during the Second Polish Republic (1918-1939) just after it regained independence. This meant that emigration was still very popular, and ultimately, 1.3 million citizens decided to emigrate. (Kołodziej, 1982; Kicinger, 2005) [FIGURE 01]. The criteria for emigration centers and the rules for the conditions that

02 The completed part of the Emigration Point in Gdynia-Grabówek, consisting of three of the twenty pavilions planned to be built, ca. 1935. © Henryk Poddębski, The National Library, 2023.



needed to be provided in them became more precise at the end of the 19th century. However, a noticeable change occurred in the perception of medicine in the first decades of the 20th century, leading to its establishment as a fully-fledged scientific field. The individual's right to health and the obligation to provide everyone with health care reached broader recognition (Więckowska, 2000). This was closely related to the healthcare policy implemented by the Republic of Poland. The Polish Emigration Society and the Emigration Syndicate, operating under the Ministry of Labor and Health Care, established the conditions for Polish emigration in the 1920s (Posłuszna, 2018). Finally, the demands of modern architecture came to the forefront, thanks to which the projects paid more attention than ever to the needs of its users, which was particularly reflected in the interiors of the buildings designed at that time. Delivered among others by Le Corbusier or Gerrit Rietveld, the slogans of a rational, clean, and healthy way of life and the need to provide everyone with access to sun, space, and greenery became determinants of a new approach to design (Overy, 2008). "I know that neither society nor the people are ready, but we have to build for a future we believe will give people happiness and dignity," Rietveld argued, referring to the thousands or even tens of thousands of people who should be encouraged "to live a happy life" (Zijl, 2018, p. 34). Interesting postulates were also put forward by Belgian architect Victor Bourgeois during the 2nd International Congress of Modern Architecture in Frankfurt am Main (CIAM II, October 24-26, 1929). Although the congress focused on the hygienic and economic-social basis of minimal housing, most of the demands presented at that time perfectly reflected the rules for the construction of collective accommodation prevailing in that period. Bourgeois emphasized the importance of ensuring sufficient air supply, maintaining constant ventilation, enlarging windows for natural light, implementing central heating, and using hot water sources (Bourgeois, 1930). By the end of the 1920s, architects stressed the importance of hygiene and health in building interior design, a mandatory requirement in modern architecture, especially for health-related facilities.

This paper discusses the changes that occurred in ways of understanding hygiene and health and, consequently, in the design of centers for emigration from Poland in the 1920s and 1930s. The first and only facility of this type in Poland[1], which was to meet the most stringent hygiene standards, was the so-called *Emigration Point* [FIGURE 02]. In 1928, a decision was made to build this comprehensive project around the newly built port in Gdynia. The author's research aimed to analyze how the principles of the Modern Movement influenced the layout of projects, pavilion designs, and functional and spatial principles. In particular, the research focused on analyzing solutions related to interior design, including layout, materials used, and furnishings. The study involved analyzing architectural design documentation to recreate the path of the 'guests' at *Emigration Point* from arrival to departure, with the goal of minimizing the risk of infection and the development of potential diseases among emigrants. This was done to protect against the spread of epidemics in the surrounding area.

03 The Marine Station in the port of Gdynia opened in 1933, and thanks to the Emigration Point in nearby Gdynia-Grabówek, it offered a complex and efficient service to all the passengers. © Henryk Poddębski, The National Library, 2023.

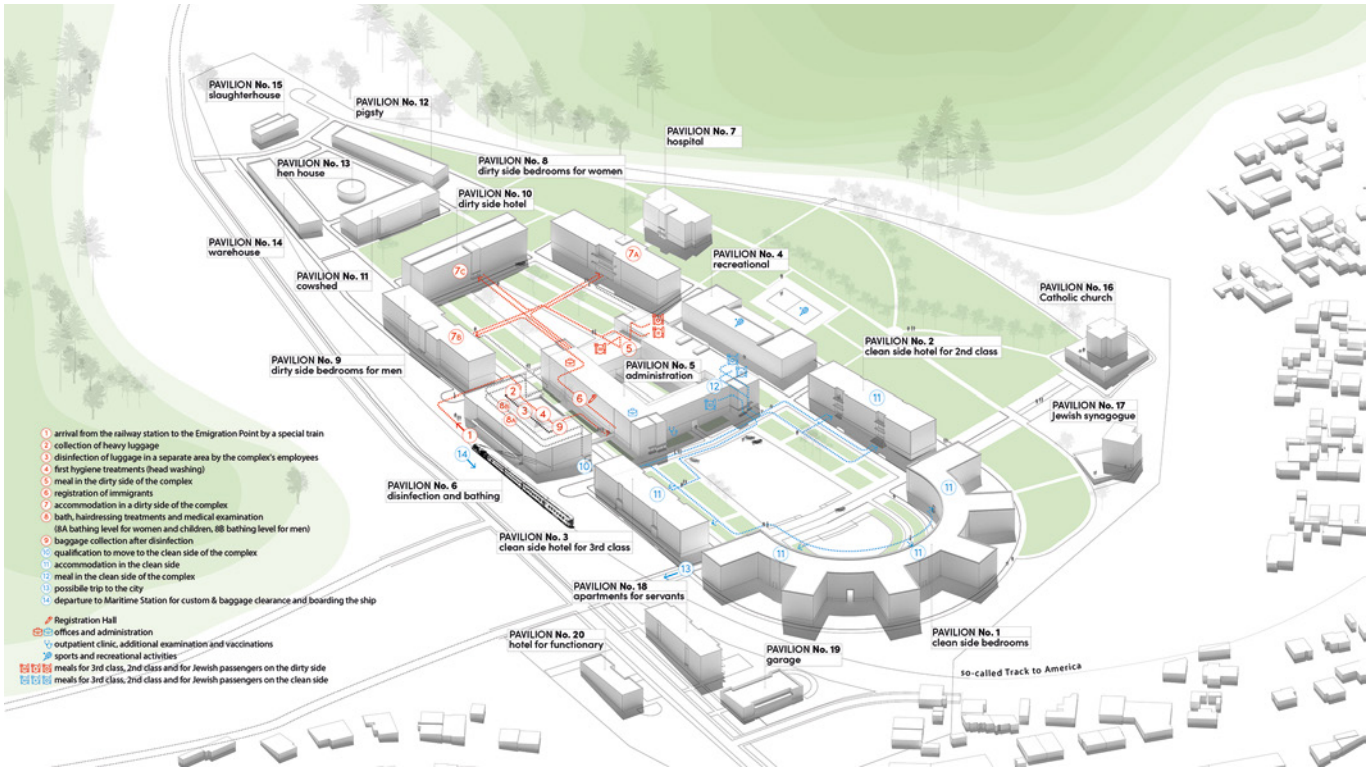
## MODERN IDEA OF AN EMIGRANT'S HOME - CONCEPTUAL APPROACH

With the rapid construction of the modern port and city of Gdynia (1923-1939) in the mid-1920s, it was one of the largest national investments of the Second Polish Republic (Orchowska, 2023). It was decided to create a professional maritime passenger transport service center, the Marine Station (1933) (Sołtysik, 1993; Orchowska, 2023) [FIGURE 03]. Much earlier, in 1928, the Ministry of Public Works commissioned the design of another important complex related to the migrant expedition, the *Emigration Point*. Until the opening of a new facility on the outskirts of Gdynia-Grabówek in the early 1930s, the Transitional Emigration Camp, founded in 1923 near Wejherowo, remained in operation. It was located in the buildings of a former psychiatric hospital (Szerle, 2004; Posłuszna, 2018), but it was a considerable distance from the port of Gdynia, as far as 47 kilometers.

Two designers specializing in architecture and urban planning, Adam Kuncewicz (1893-1945) and Adam Paprocki (1891-1940), were responsible for the design, both from the planning and architectural perspective. In 1929, they developed the innovative design of a completely new emigration complex and land development. For economic reasons, it was decided to divide the task into stages. The first phase of construction, which included three buildings, was completed and put into operation in 1932. However, due to changes in the emigration policy of the United States, emigration from Central and Eastern Europe decreased. As a result, the implementation of this innovative project was unfortunately discontinued.

04 Emigrants getting ready for their journey at the Emigration Point had access to spacious interiors, well-lit with both artificial and natural light, along with other modern amenities in the 'clean' zone. These facilities ensured epidemiological safety and, most importantly, highly humane conditions, photo undated. © The National Digital Archives, 2023.

The emigration complex was designed to prepare emigrants for their journey following global standards set forth by the Emigration Office [FIGURE 04]. The complex was constructed on the outskirts of the city, away from residential areas, for sanitation purposes. The project design included twenty independent pavilions arranged in a small valley on a forested moraine plateau, even though, as mentioned above, only three were ultimately built. The areas surrounding the pavilions were designed as open, park-like spaces for residents to walk during their stay. The complex's location provided a healing environment, allowing residents to connect with nature and enjoy views of the port to the north and the Bay of Gdańsk. The pavilions were arranged in the shape of a water droplet,




05 Axonometric view of the Emigration Point complex according to the design documentation of the architects A. Kuncewicz & A. Paprocki from 1929 (only partially implemented), along with the guests' original 'hygienic route.' © Author, 2023.

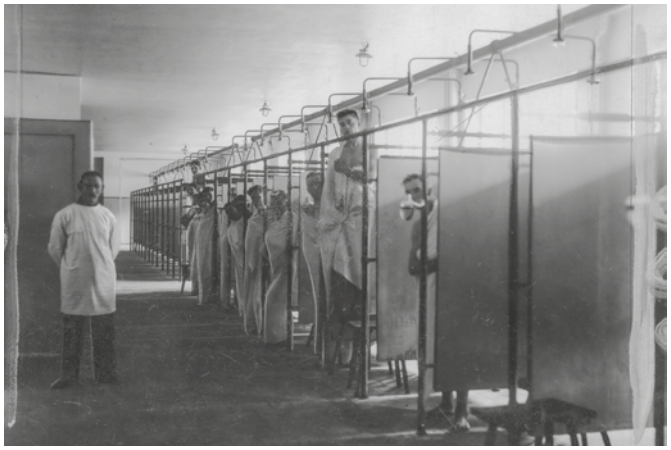
06 One of the collective bedrooms in Pavilion No. 9. The design took into account important hygienic aspects of the interior of the then-emigrant's house, such as access to natural light through large horizontal windows and the supply of fresh air through efficient ventilation installations, 1930. © The Emigration Museum, 2023.

reflecting the design's ideology and relationship with nature (Posłuszna, 2018). Here, this symbolism had its justification, as it represented cleanliness and purity, as well as renewal. Pavilion Nº 5 was located in the central part of the complex and was used for administration and catering. The *Emigration Point* project aimed to prevent the spread of infections by separating two zones: a 'dirty' zone, where people stayed until they underwent hygiene treatments and disinfection, and a 'clean' zone. The emigration authorities strictly defined the rules, stating that guests from the 'clean' side were not allowed to come into contact with those from the 'dirty' side. The complex had special divisions between the pavilions to separate each side.

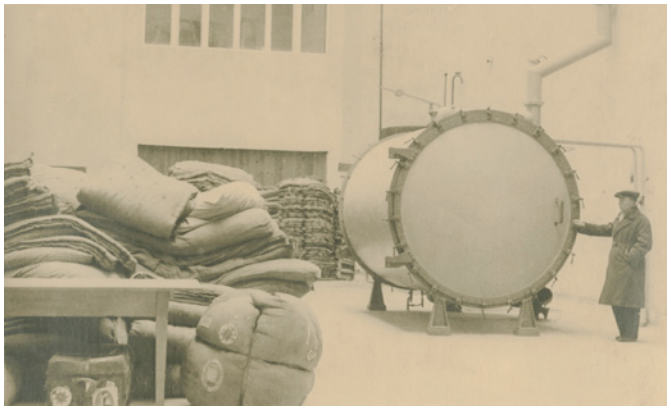
## "HYGIENIC ROUTE" IN THE *EMIGRATION POINT* – SPATIAL LAYOUT

To better understand the emigrant's 'route' within the complex, their movement between individual parts was divided into stages and activities [FIGURE 05]. Travelers arrived at the *Emigration Point* by train from the Gdynia railway station, using the 'Track to America' railway siding. Upon arrival, they dropped off their luggage at Pavilion Nº 6 [2], where the staff disinfected it [3]. After that, the travelers underwent hygienic procedures [4]. Following this, they had their first meal in the dining room on the 'dirty side' [5] (3rd class, 2nd class, and Jewish passengers had separate dining areas). They then proceeded to the Registration Hall [6] to complete emigration formalities. On the 'dirty side,' the passengers were accommodated in three separate buildings [7A, 7B, 7C], with a capacity of 700 guests in total [FIGURE 06]. Additionally, a relaxation room with a reading area and library (Pavilion Nº 5) was available for guest use.

To gain access to the clean side of the complex, all guests were required to undergo extensive medical examinations and a thorough bath [8], which included shaving of their genitals, in Pavilion Nº 6. The women and children's baths [8A] were located on the first floor, while the men's baths [8B] were on the second floor [FIGURE 07]. Both areas were equipped with showers and rooms with bathtubs, as well as waiting rooms and locker rooms for undressing and handing over clothes for disinfection. After bathing and medical examinations, guests collected their disinfected and sanitized clothes in the dressing room [9]. They would then proceed to the clean side of the complex



07 Sanitary room with showers for men located on one of the bathing levels in Pavilion No. 6, which was designed within the Emigration Point complex as an independent facility dedicated to hygiene and disinfection treatments, undated. © The National Digital Archives, 2023.



08 Steam chamber used to disinfect luggage as well as various bedding items provided by Emigration Point, such as mattresses, duvets, bed linen, etc., 1930. © The Emigration Museum, 2023.

through a dedicated exit [10]. If any sudden illnesses were detected, those individuals would be directed to Pavilion Nº 7, which served as a hospital located on the outskirts of the complex.

The bathhouse could accommodate 600 people over a nine-hour working day in three three-hour rounds. It offered full hygiene treatments, including washing clothes and disinfecting luggage. The facility featured a state-of-the-art bathhouse, the largest in the country at the time, with modern sanitary and hygienic features. Additionally, a professional mechanical laundry was installed to meet the requirements of a modern emigration center [FIGURE 08]. After the washing cycle was completed, the clean underwear was returned via the second elevator and handed out to the owners. Additionally, there were rooms where detailed disinfection was possible using hydrocyanic acid. The chemical compound *prussic acid*, prepared from Prussian blue by Carl Scheele in 1780 and used in dilution by qualified workers, was undeniably the best method for effective disinfection in the 1930s (Koskowski, 1934).

After completing the cleaning and disinfection process on the dirty side, the guests would be accommodated in one of three buildings on the clean side [11]. There was a total of 1,300 places available for them. After settling in, emigrants could have a meal in the dining rooms on the clean side [12], which were accessible only through special entrances on the north side of Pavilion Nº 5. Using other entrances, they could undergo additional medical examinations, mandatory vaccinations, and complete the rest of the travel formalities. While staying on the clean side, guests could also take advantage of the *Emigration Point's* amenities. Pavilion Nº 4 was to include recreation rooms and a sports field in its backyard. Additionally, the design included a recreation room for 800 users and two reading rooms for 300-400 people each (a cinema, a lecture hall, or a stage). A Christian chapel (Pavilion Nº 16) and a Jewish synagogue (Pavilion Nº 17) were to be located on a gentle hill among the greenery on the western side of the complex. After entering the clean side, while waiting for their ship to arrive at the port, guests were permitted to go sightseeing [13] in Gdynia, which was being built at that time as it was called the "pride of Poles." On the day of the announced arrival of the ship that was to take the emigrants on board, they went to the port by a special train [14] and thus left the *Emigration Point*.

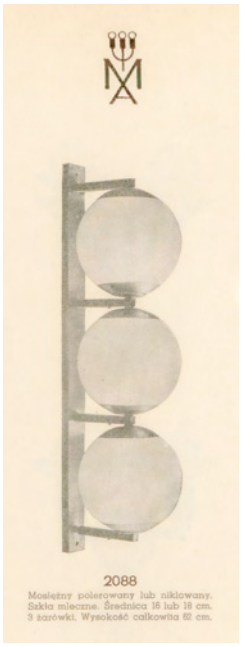
The idea for the *Emigration Point* to be a self-sufficient complex required that it fulfill all necessary and accompanying functions and be equipped with all necessary devices. Staff facilities were near the entrance, and farm facilities were by the forest. Pavilions, including a cowshed, pigsty, warehouse, slaughterhouse, and hen house, surrounded the trapezoidal courtyard.

## MILLION BRICKS: INTERIORS AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE *EMIGRATION POINT* - MATERIAL QUALITIES

The interior of the *Emigration Point* required the use of hygienic and easy-to-clean materials for sanitary reasons. As a result, Portland cement-based terrazzo floors were used in the sanitary rooms, halls, and corridors. This type of finish was commonly used in public buildings that experience heavy foot traffic. Its advantages are well-known to architects who seek to provide long-lasting protection and a durable finish to the floors of the buildings they design (Walker, 2014). Different materials were chosen for different areas of the building. Black terrazzo was used for the entrances, staircases, and sanitary rooms, terracotta floors were used in the halls and bathrooms, while oak planks were used in representative rooms and upper floors.

The design of the *Emigration Point* was influenced not only by cleanliness and hygiene but also by modern and elegant architectural solutions. The Registration Hall, in particular, was designed with two-story-high windows that allowed natural light to fill the space. The interior featured bright plastered walls, coffered reinforced concrete ceilings, as well as simple wooden service counters and wooden facings of walls and columns, creating a

09 The most representative interior at the Emigration Point was the Registration Hall in Pavilion No. 5, ca 1935. © "Mare Nostrum" Gdynia, The Emigration Museum, 2023.




10 Lighting fixture used in the design of the Reception Hall. Polished or nickel-plated brass base, total height 62 cm, with three glass lampshades, designed by A. Marciniak, 1930. © Electric Chandelier Factory A. Marciniak Warsaw (catalog), author's archive.

striking contrast [FIGURE 09]. The interior was accentuated by impressive modernist light fixtures in the form of wall lamps consisting of three illuminated spherical lampshades [FIGURE 10].

According to the architects' intention, all of the pavilions of the complex were to be faced with cement bricks, then referred to as 'cementówka' (Manduk, 1930). The architecture of buildings finished this way was supposed to give the impression of cleanliness and sterility. However, the brick's basic feature was its durability (Nechay, 1939). In the 1930s, many press articles and guide publications promoted the use of 'gray brick' for facing building façades due to its favorable price. According to practitioners and designers from Poland, positive examples of architectural solutions based on cement bricks from Holland, England, and Germany have encouraged the use of this method. They agreed that facing buildings with ordinary and cement bricks required a specific design and a special type of architecture. This type of architecture was unrelated to classicism but was not devoid of detail, thanks to the diversified structure of the elevation. (Adamski, 1939, pp. 295-296).

The *Emigration Point* was constructed using light gray bricks of quality class I, with dimensions of 270 x 130 x 60 mm, which were supplied by the Saturn Brickyard located in Chełmno in Pomerania, under the supervision of Eng. Alfred Dziedziul i S-ka. The construction required a total of 1,000 deliveries, each containing 1,000 bricks. The unique architecture of *Emigration Point* was determined by the bricklaying method. The façade consists of two types of finishing. The ground floor parts and entrances and the avant-corps containing staircases with characteristic, vertical, thermometer-type windows were finished with bricks in a textural arrangement. These surfaces were diversified by the protrusion of every second layer of bricks [FIGURE 11] (Hirsch, 2016), which gave the architecture an expressive effect [FIGURE 12]. The remaining surfaces consisted of a smooth brick wall arranged in a cross bond, characterized by an alternating arrangement of one stretching course per heading course. Typically, this type of façade finishing is referenced with the so-called "Warsaw School" and the works of, among others, architects Franciszek Lilpop, Romuald Gutt, Karol Jankowski, and Czesław Przybylski (Dybczyńska-Bułyszko, 2010). Although the architects of *Emigration Point* were from Warsaw, Gdynia was referred to as the 'maritime capital of the country' during the interwar period. The façades of many modernist buildings were adorned with gray cement bricks.

## CONCLUSIONS

Architects Adam Kuncewicz and Adam Paprocki designed *Emigration Point* in 1929 in line with the Modern Movement. The complex was created to meet high standards of sanitary and hygienic conditions, ensuring epidemiological safety while approaching people with humanity. The design was health-conscious and aimed to ensure the mental well-being of its users. It provided solutions to respond to cultural needs, promote physical activity, and offer emotional fulfillment for people emigrating from this last stop on the European continent. The complex included various social functions and pavilions on the premises. Guests were accommodated in isolation from the city and underwent careful health checks. The self-sufficient complex was surrounded by nature and designed to ensure the safety of the emigrants and their loved ones

11 A portrait of students from the Department of Road and Water Engineering and State Communication at the School of Construction in Poznań, gathered in front of one of the entrances to the newly built Emigration Point. In later years, the facility also served as a tourist hostel. The building's distinctive façade, featuring brick detailing, is clearly visible, circa 1932. © Private collection of Elżbieta Wykrzykowska, 2025.

12 The former disinfection and bathing pavilion (No. 6) adapted to military function in the post-war years (nowadays, the 33rd Air Defense Missile Squadron). View from the railway ramp. © Robert Hirsch, 2014.

during their journey while also guaranteeing entry to their country of destination without the risk of rejection.

The designers carefully planned the building complex. Considering the general layout idea in the shape of a water droplet, we can imagine how the symbolism resonated here, embodying the ideals of cleanliness, purity, and renewal. In the design, they paid close attention to every detail, especially focusing on spatial and functional interior solutions. They used modern finishing materials in the design (e.g., glass and metal, terrazzo and terracotta floors, smooth wooden paneling) with hygienic surfaces. This was not only to reflect the trends of the 1920s and 1930s but also to make cleanliness easier to maintain in *Emigration Point*. A complex of this size would require professional, mechanized equipment for cleaning clothes and disinfecting luggage at a large scale, as well as extensive catering facilities.

The unfinished complex included three main facilities: a disinfection and bathing pavilion (no. 6), an administration pavilion (no. 5), and a hotel pavilion (no. 9). Until the late 1930s, they met the limited needs of emigration services and also served as a tourist base for the city of Gdynia. However, after World War II, the complex stopped serving its original purpose and was repurposed as a military base. The former *Emigration Point* no longer appears on the city map, and its significance has been forgotten by the residents despite its cultural importance in Gdynia's history.

The ambitious design and careful approach to sanitation in the *Emigration Point* project offer valuable lessons, especially since it was developed during a time of significant health threats. The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted medical industry specialists and facility designers to rethink how to meet sanitary and hygienic requirements to address increased health risks. The concepts in the Gdynia *Emigration Point* project remain relevant, providing important insights into disease prevention, isolation, and user accommodation. One of the most significant takeaways is the project's ethical and comprehensive approach, focusing not only on public health but also on social and emotional aspects for the guests of the

facility. Despite being subject to strict hygiene procedures, they are offered a comprehensive program to enhance their stay in isolation. In conclusion, isolation of potentially ill people is a tool that should be used with caution and as a last resort. The *Emigration Point* project, proposed in 1928, is proof of how solutions can be sought that allow for the protection of public health while respecting the rights and dignity of ill people.

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## ENDNOTES

1 The Second Polish Republic repurposed existing buildings in Warsaw, Gdańsk, and Wejherowo to handle emigration traffic before Emigration Point was established, but these facilities lacked proper hygienic and medical services.