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Restoration of medieval gords on the example of the “in the meadows” Gord in Wiślica: a case study

Introduction

In Poland, there are many instances of traces of settlement left by different cultures. These include, among others, relics from the prehistoric period, i.e. settlements of the Lusatian culture, early medieval remains of Slavic settlements or structures from the time of the establishment and existence of the Polish state. Gords, which are part of the history of settlement, due to their structure, are distinctive and mostly easily identifiable in the landscape, while also excellently blending in with their surroundings. Due to scant information about them and little public knowledge concerning them, they are often confused with natural geological formations. In Poland we have more than 2.500 examples of recorded gords, most of which are under statutory conservation, e.g., in the form of archaeological preserves [1]. The inadequate marking of these sites in space, combined with a lack of widespread information, results in little public interest and, consequently, in monuments becoming forgotten and falling into disrepair. This contributes to a lack of attention to history and the upholding of values associated with cultural heritage.

In recent years, there has been a marked increase in interest in revitalising and revalorising the remains of medieval structures, including gords, together with their immediate surroundings. The overarching aim of these measures is to protect monuments and provide public, attractive access to the cultural heritage, as well as to develop social and regional awareness and identity. The skilful maintenance

of monuments allows the site to be made accessible to the public, while emphasising its educational value, in a way that protects its historical value and prevents damage. As a result, society is becoming more aware, but also more discerning in its search for specialist knowledge.

Despite the increasing number of examples of the revitalisation of gords, preparing design documentation and carrying out projects still face numerous difficulties and requirements. Funding such projects is often marginalised by local governments, which allocate funds in their budgets to other, more pressing needs. The areas on which the gords are located are often privately owned and, consequently, there are instances of damage through agricultural cultivation. Informed local authorities are making efforts to reclaim these areas and implement procedures to start their restoration as soon as possible. Structures such as gords, which are nationally and continentally unique monuments, when restored, contribute significantly to social and economic activity, including increasing tourist traffic in a given region. One example of such a process is the Karpacka Troja archaeological open-air museum in Trzcenica, whose main element are the remains of a gord. Łukasz Śpiewła stated that the local population is fully aware of the open-air museum, as are tourists who come here in large numbers from various parts of the country and abroad, whose number reached around 60 thousand in 2011 [2]. Gords and their surroundings are beginning to transform from land forms that are often decayed and generate material loss, into spaces that bring profit and that sport well-exhibited rampart forms enhanced with information about their history. Such measures make these facilities more financially independent of state administrative resources. There is no clear-cut concept for the revitalisation of medieval gord remains. Each site, by virtue of its location, state of preservation, legal status, the state of knowledge about it, the way it is developed, must be considered individually.

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Nevertheless, there are general principles that should be followed. The authors of this paper discuss the development of the gord “in the meadows” in Wiślica, as related to the accessibility of the site to visitors in the context of the constraints arising from the impossibility of interfering with the historical fabric.

In situ exposition of gords, on the example of the gord in Wiślica

The debate on the appropriateness of reconstructing gords is still ongoing. There are both supporters and opponents of this form of spatial visualisation among specialists in the field. The International Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage, the so-called Lausanne Charter of 1989, states that *The presentation of the archaeological heritage to the general public is an essential method of promoting an understanding of the origins and development of modern societies. [...] Where possible and appropriate, reconstructions should not be built immediately on the archaeological remains, and should be identifiable as such* [3, p. 12]. According to Michał Pawleta, two basic forms of reconstruction should be distinguished – preserves and archaeological parks. An archaeological preserve is a faithful reconstruction developed on the site of an excavation, while an archaeological park is a reconstruction of structures or a demonstration of ancient building techniques developed on any site. The preserve is of academic and natural value, yet its primary role is to protect and publicly share archaeological heritage. Meanwhile, the main purpose of archaeological parks is entertainment, recreation and education [4]. There are known examples of gords whose condition and extent of surviving relics have allowed the development of a reliable reconstruction. In Poland, one such site is the Archaeological Museum in Biskupin, which presents a reconstruction of a defensive settlement from the turn of the Bronze and Iron Ages. Another interesting example is the reconstruction of a settlement located on an island in Lake Āraiši, in what is now Latvia, some 80 km north-east of Riga. Due to numerous archaeological discoveries and extensive research by Jānis Apals in the 1960s and 1970s, the remains of ancient houses, many artefacts and pieces of pottery were found. This provided in-depth insight into how the gord was built and how it functioned. This made it possible to arrive at a credible reconstruction of a settlement that functioned in the 9th century. The buildings were erected using carpentry techniques, with attention to historical detail and the use of natural materials [5].

Wiślica is a unique medieval town¹ rich in numerous historical buildings. It is located in south-eastern Poland, in the picturesque Nida Valley, in what is now the Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship. Today Wiślica is one of the smaller towns in Poland [6]². A short distance from its centre, on an outcrop of gypsum rock, there is an early

medieval gord known as “in the meadows” (Fig. 1). It is covered by statutory conservation via a listing in the register of monuments under No. Aa329/508. Archaeological investigations of the site have been carried out on several occasions. In the years 1949–1960, archaeological investigation was carried out as part of a broad research programme of the so-called millennium studies led by Włodzimierz Antoniewicz and Zofia Wartołowska [7]. They were focused, among other things, on identifying the techniques used to build the ramparts in the north and west sections. The study of the gord was revisited several more times by Dorota Górna, Joanna Kalaga and Zbigniew Pianowski and in 1996–1998 by Waldemar Gliński, whose aim was to identify the construction technique of the eastern line of fortifications [8], [9]. At the beginning of May 2021, archaeological work once again began on the gord, led by Nina Glińska on behalf of the Voivodeship Conservator of Monuments in Kielce. The aim of the non-invasive geophysical survey was to define the boundaries of the entire complex and to understand the construction of its ramparts. The form of the gord is well preserved and legible in the terrain. Unfortunately, its current state can be assessed as “neglected”. The site is overgrown with trees, self-sown plants and weeds, and there are mounds in the eastern part of the site which are the remains of former archaeological investigations. The municipality of Wiślica has made efforts to restructure the gord together with the adjacent area³ and to make the site accessible to the public by carrying out its revalorisation. Pursuant to the applicable *Ustawa z dnia 23 lipca 2003 r. o ochronie zabytków i opiece nad zabytkami* [Monument Protection and Preservation Act], [...] *the protection of monuments consists, in particular, of ensuring legal, organisational and financial conditions that enable the permanent preservation of monuments and their development and maintenance, and the preservation of a monument consists, in particular, in popularising and disseminating knowledge about the monument and its significance for history and culture* [10, art. 4, 5]. It is clear from the quoted sections of the Act that the owner of a monument is obligated to make the site available to the public and at the same time ensure its survival for future generations. The protection of gords consists, among other things, of preventing further damage to the site, [...] *because, regardless of its state of preservation, the form that has survived to our times is part of the historical fabric and is subject to conservation* [11, p. 274]. The restoration of gords is always a challenge for the designer. Adaptive reuse, associated with opening the site to visitors, must be performed without interfering with the historical tissue of the relic. Another consideration is the presence of the archaeological site in the cultural landscape, of which gords are a prime example. The relationship of architectural and urban heritage to the landscape is emphasised by the so-called Krakow Charter of 2000, whose authors stated that *Landscapes [...] are testimony to the evolving relation-*

¹ It was granted town rights in 1326.

² In 2018, it was given title of the smallest city in Poland, with a population of 503.

³ Initially, the site extended beyond the boundary of the plot of land on which the gord was located.



Fig. 1. Gord “in the meadows” in Wiślica, aerial view (photo by D. Przygodzki, 2018)

Il. 1. Grodzisko „na łąkach” w Wiślicy, widok z lotu ptaka (fot. D. Przygodzki, 2018)

ship of communities, individuals and their environment. [...] It is important to understand and respect the character of landscapes, and apply appropriate laws and norms to harmonize relevant territorial functions with essential values. In many societies, landscapes are historically related to urban territories and influences [12, p. 137].

The landscape of Wiślica should be placed under special protection not only because the town’s location on the charming River Nida is exceptionally picturesque. Most importantly, Wiślica is located in an area protected under the Natura 2000 programme, and within the boundaries of the Nadnidziański Landscape Park [13]. The area has retained exceptional natural landscape features as it is still not intensively populated or urbanised. The necessity of introducing new elements to enable safe and effective as well as interesting visits to the site is connected with a construction project at the gord. A compromise has to be found that reconciles the needs of the tourist with the obligation to protect the historical site, while respecting the needs and customs of the local community, and using engineering solutions that make it possible to minimise interference with the archaeological layers of the gord.

Revalorisation objectives and presumptions

The Municipality of Wiślica has developed Revitalisation Programme 2016–2025 for the Municipality of Wiślica, which aimed to address the low socio-economic development of the region. Measures were taken to create a new tourist product – a historical and tourist trail that would lead to the early medieval gord. The planned project involved the refurbishment and restoration of the gord [14]. The revitalisation project was expected to con-

tribute to the establishment of new businesses, new jobs, and to increase the number of tourists visiting Wiślica. In advance, in 2005, the municipality, in consultation with the Voivodeship Office for the Protection of Monuments in Kielce, issued a public project siting decision [15]. In 2018, thanks to the efforts of the then mayor Stanisław Krzak, Wiślica regained its urban status, and the President of the Republic of Poland recognised the collegiate church complex of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary, together with the relics of the church of St. Nicholas and the Wiślica gord, as a Monument to History [16]. In the same year, the municipality of Wiślica announced a competition for an urban and architectural design proposal for the project entitled *Thousand-Year-Old Wiślica – in the footsteps of splendour – establishment of the “Through the Prehistory of Christian Wiślica” tourist route*. The competition was to select the best entry, which would become a basis for the preparation of further technical documentation. Following this, a conceptual design was drafted, which, as per the competition’s scope, included the adaptation of the site for tourist traffic, the restoration of the original angle of the ramparts and their elevation, the refurbishment of the main square and the rampart, the clearing of unnecessary greenery, the introduction of footpaths with educational elements, reconstructing the gate, the former buildings of the gord and the partial restoration of the palisade (Figs. 2, 3) [17, p. 6]. As a result of approvals of the planned project with administrative bodies, the Voivodeship Office for the Protection of Monuments in Kielce and the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (NID) issued their opinions and recommendations. The documents are a response to a design proposal developed by Arche-con, a Krakow-based architectural studio. Both documents confirm that



Fig. 2. Gord "in the meadows" in Wiślica, competition design (elaborated by Arche-con, 2018)

II. 2. Grodzisko „na łąkach” w Wiślicy, projekt konkursowy (oprac. Arche-con, 2018)

the initiative to create a historical and educational tourist route that will highlight the monuments of Wiślica and contribute to the attractiveness of the area is justified. However, the most relevant guidelines concerned the gord. Both institutions considered it beneficial, indeed necessary, to work on refurbishing the main yard and the rampart after the previous archaeological investigations. On the other hand, the proposal for the partial reconstruction of the former gord buildings was assessed negatively, and it was argued that this would displace other monuments that are more conducive to preserving the most highly valued historic values, i.e., authenticity of substance and form. In its opinion, the NID negatively assessed measures to correct the rampart, which would change the form of the gord and

damage the preserved historical substance of the site [18]. The guidelines [...] indicate the principle of maximum respect for the original substance of the monument and all its values, the principle of minimum necessary interference (refraining from unnecessary actions). These principles correspond with the 1989 International Charter for the Protection and Management of the Archaeological Heritage, which stipulates, among other things, that reconstructed structures should not be implemented directly as a part of authentic sites – archaeological monuments [19, p. 2]. The authors of both opinions emphasise that the Wiślica gord is one of the most important sites related to the formation of Polish statehood and deserves world-class presentation. Following discussions with representatives of the Voivodeship Monument Protection Office in Kielce, Arche-con created a design which combines the expectations of the municipality's representatives with the assumptions and requirements of the decision-making institutions (Fig. 4).

Proposed technical solutions

The restoration of the gord was divided into two phases. The first stage involved the clearing of the rampart and yard from excess greenery, primarily low, wild bushes, which disrupted the perception of the outline of the rampart crest, as well as the incline and form of the rampart itself. The trees at the foot of the rampart on its outer side will be retained as their crowns are well above the rampart crest and do not obstruct it. The former archaeological excavations left over from the period of archaeological exploration in the 1960s and 1970s will be backfilled, while the excavated soil will be spread over the surface of the



Fig. 3. Conceptual design of the restoration of the gord "in the meadows". The restoration of a stylised gate and palisade on the rampart crest (elaborated by Arche-con, 2019)

II. 3. Projekt ideowy rewitalizacji grodziska „na łąkach”. Restytucja na koronie wału symbolicznie stylizowanej bramy wraz z palisadą (oprac. Arche-con, 2019)

Fig. 4. The final version of the development project for the gord area:
 A – buffer layer on the rampart crest and the yard,
 B – path,
 C – platform,
 (elaborated by Arche-con, 2019)

II. 4. Ostateczna wersja projektu zagospodarowania terenu grodziska:
 A – warstwa buforowa na koronie wału oraz majdanie,
 B – ścieżka,
 C – podest,
 (oprac. Arche-con, 2019)



yard. Remnants of former excavations are located on the eastern part of the gord yard and on the eastern rampart. The work will be carried out under close archaeological supervision and using a metal detector to check for hidden artefacts in the excavated soil. The aim of this measure is to secure the cultural layers exposed in the archaeological profiles, to improve the appearance of the gord by making its preserved form more legible, and to make the site safe for use by partially levelling the surface of the yard and the eastern rampart while maintaining its present form and natural relief. The second phase of the project involves the introduction of a small buffer layer of a few centimetres on the yard and on the crest of the rampart in the form of new turf evenly distributed in a way that does not interfere with the current form of the gord, i.e., its shape, angle of inclination and height of the rampart (Fig. 5). The buffer zone will allow new timbers to be laid in a way that does not interfere with the protected authentic historic layer of the gord. In the interior of the gord, the course of foot-paths will be replicated, in accordance with the concept developed by Tomasz Sajecki [20]. In the area of the yard and on the crest of the rampart, pedestrian circulation will take place along free-form, irregular wooden paths designed in the form of transverse wooden planks attached to longitudinal joists. This structure will be laid on top of the buffer layer to protect the archaeological layers (Fig. 6). The locations of the original gord buildings will be highlighted by wooden platforms, slightly raised above ground level, placed in the actual locations of the exposed buildings [21]. The dimensions of the platforms will correspond to the actual size of the discovered objects [22]. It is planned to include 21 platforms made using traditional carpentry techniques. Planks measuring 20×4 cm will be fixed to 16×16 cm wooden mudsills. The structure will

be fixed in the ground using steel picks with a stabilising plate on a “buffer” gravel layer. The symbolic platforms will be complemented by information boards depicting archaeological discoveries relating to the site, together with a description and drawing of its presumed appearance and function (Fig. 7).

Conclusions

To summarise the information presented in this paper, it should be emphasised that the concept of developing the gord “in the meadows” in Wiślica is of key signifi-

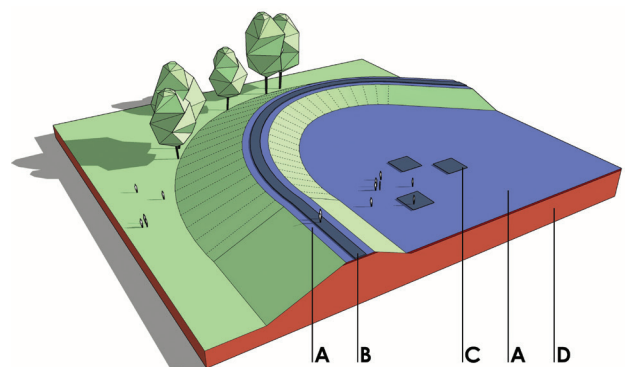


Fig. 5. A fragment of the gord. Distribution of buffer zones:
 A – buffer layer on the rampart crest and the yard,
 B – path, C – platform, D – archaeological layers
 (elaborated by D. Przygodzki, 2023)

II. 5. Fragment grodziska. Rozmieszczenie stref buforowych:
 A – warstwa buforowa na koronie wału oraz majdanie,
 B – ścieżka, C – podest, D – warstwy archeologiczne
 (oprac. D. Przygodzki, 2023)

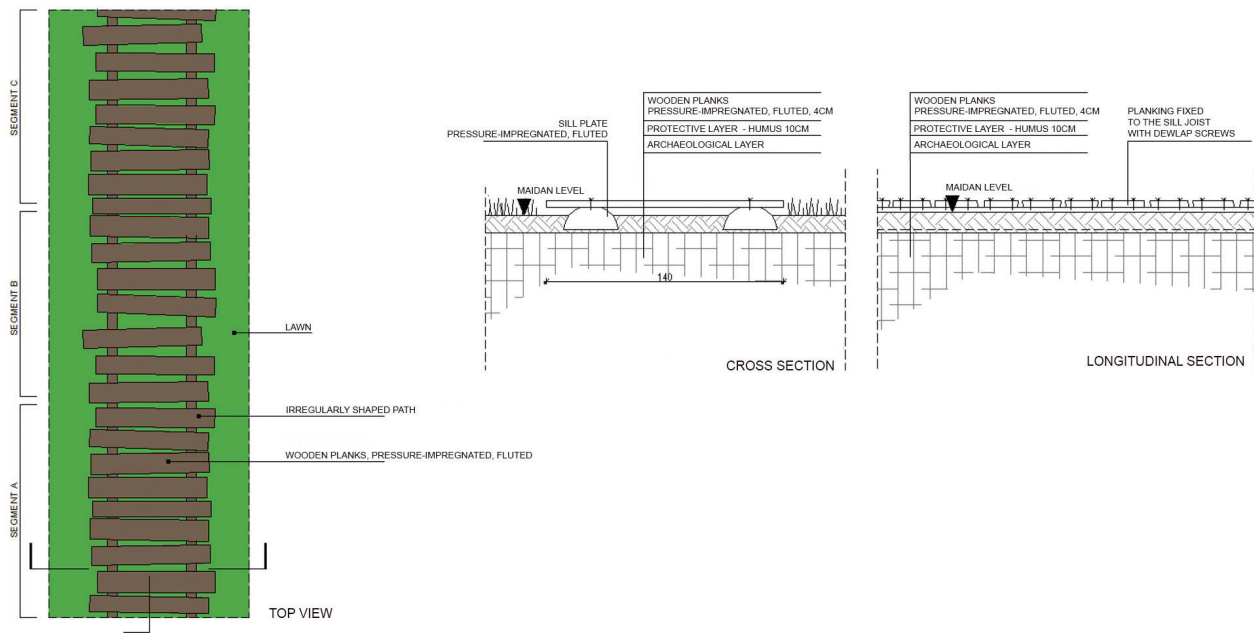


Fig. 6. Wooden path (elaborated by Arche-con, 2019)

II. 6. Ścieżka drewniana (oprac. Arche-con, 2019)

cance for more than just the region itself. In the cited design of the development of the gord, it was possible to develop a shared, satisfactory vision of the scope of the site's revalorisation. Technical solutions were proposed to make the site accessible and visitable, while preserving its priceless historical value for future generations of researchers. By introducing several centimetres of buffer layer, tourist traffic outside the designated paths will not expose the gord to damage. The adopted form of the new elements, which does not directly suggest the shapes of the presumed structures located on the gord site, allows for reinterpretations of current and future architectural and archaeological research, leaving the possibility for

further projects intended to popularise and protect the site. The solutions adopted are aligned with sustainability principles. The measures taken will have a positive impact on the local community, as not only the economic, but also the social and cultural situation of Wiślica will be positively changed with the provision of access to cultural heritage. The project to develop the gord is currently underway. The selected construction contractor is making preparations for the project.

Zbigniew Kobyliński wrote of cultural heritage: [...] *although it consists of the creations of the past, it is to a large extent a product of the present; it is a contemporary social construct, attributed in a continuous process of change to ever-new phenomena from the past* [23, p. 1141]. Any projects carried out on historic buildings provide a link between the past and the present, including by their adaptive reuse, for instance as a museum. There are numerous projects that feature providing visitors access to a gord, such as the reconstruction of the Owidz 11th-century gord [24]. Reconstructions erected at original sites often meet with disapproval from historians and archaeologists, due to the lack of sufficient and reliable archaeological research. In the opinion of the authors, the tendency to gradually move away from erecting reconstructions and the design of structures that are typically insufficiently based on architectural and archaeological findings, is correct. Instead, it becomes more beneficial to use the latest media technologies. They enable digital reconstructions to be made and a virtual model to be built in augmented reality. They allow the resulting image to be adjusted as new findings emerge, so as to ensure compliance with up-to-date knowledge.

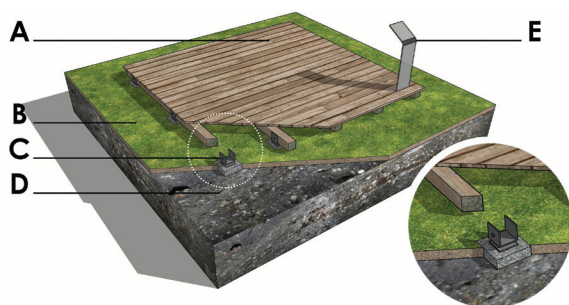


Fig. 7. A platform symbolising the gord's development:

- A – platform, B – buffer layer on the yard,
 - C – steel pin with stabilising plate on the “buffer” gravel layer,
 - D – archaeological layers, E – information board
- (elaborated by D. Przygodzki, 2023)

II. 7. Podest symbolizujący zabudowę grodziska:

- A – podest, B – warstwa buforowa na majdanie,
 - C – stalowy szpikulec z płytka stabilizującą
- na „buforowej” warstwie żwirowej, D – warstwy archeologiczne, E – tablica informacyjna (oprac. D. Przygodzki, 2023)

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Abstract

Restoration of medieval gords on the example of the “in the meadows” gord in Wiślica: a case study

This paper presents a case study of the revalorisation of the gord “in the meadows” in Wiślica. The authors present design issues related to the archaeological-architectural site. The administrative and legal processes that resulted in the implementation of a restoration plan for a building under statutory conservation are illustrated. The paper presents design decisions made on the basis of collected information, archaeological findings, conservation guidelines, administrative permits and conservatorial constraints. The solutions adopted to preserve the priceless historical value of the site, while making it accessible to tourists and researchers, are explained and presented.

Key words: architecture, revalorisation, Wiślica, conservation of monuments, gord

Streszczenie

Problematyka rewitalizacji grodzisk średniowiecznych. Grodzisko „na łąkach” w Wiślicy – studium przypadku

W artykule omówiono studium przypadku rewitalizacji grodziska „na łąkach” w Wiślicy. Autorzy przedstawili problematykę projektową związaną z obiektem archeologiczno-architektonicznym. Ukazali procesy administracyjno-prawne skutkujące wdrożeniem planu rewitalizacji obiektu objętego ochroną konserwatorską. W pracy zaprezentowano decyzje projektowe podjęte na podstawie zebranych informacji, badań archeologicznych

nych, wytycznych konserwatorskich, uzyskanych pozwoleń oraz ograniczeń natury konserwatorskiej. Wyjaśniono i zaprezentowano przyjęte rozwiązania, które pozwalają na zachowanie bezcennej wartości historycznej obiektu, a jednocześnie umożliwiają udostępnienie obiektu zwiedzającym turystom i badaczom.

Słowa kluczowe: architektura, rewaloryzacja, Wiślica, konserwacja zabytków, grodzisko