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Article

Post-War Architecture and Urban Planning as Means of Reinventing Opole's Past and Identity

Barbara Szczepańska

Institute of Art History, University of Wrocław, Poland; barbara.szczepanska2@uwr.edu.pl

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Abstract
In 1945, Opole experienced a disruption in its history—a formerly German city had been incorporated into southwestern Poland during the change of European borders. In this new geopolitical situation Opole, along with other pre-war Eastern outskirts of Germany, became a part of so-called Recovered Territories. The name itself implied that those lands were perceived as not only incorporated into the country but brought back as undeniably Polish. The process of establishing (or "regaining") the Polish identity of those cities, among them Opole, was intended to omit some elements of the recent German past and emphasize others deemed inherently Polish at that time. This occurrence was also tied to the issue of rewriting and reinventing the city's history, during which architecture and urban planning were used as one of the most powerful tools. The article presents how architecture and urban planning were used in the process of establishing Opole's new, Polish identity since 1945. The attempts to rewrite and reinvent Opole's history are exemplified by the restoration of the historic city centre, as well as by new, post-war architecture and urban development. The legacy of that process still lingers in the city's urban fabric. The strive to emphasise "Polish" elements of the city while omitting or repurposing the German ones makes one pose questions about the role of architecture (both historic and new), urban planning, and the narratives created around them in the process of rewriting and reinventing a city's past and identity.

Keywords
architecture; monuments; Opole; Poland; post-war period; Recovered Territories; urban planning

Issue
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1. Introduction

The end of World War II brought about significant changes in regard to Poland's borders. The organizers of the Potsdam conference decided that the country's borderline would be redrawn: Poland simultaneously lost territories east of the Curzon Line (as they became incorporated into the Soviet Union) and gained those located east of the Odra and Nysa rivers (which, before 1945, were borderlands between Poland and Germany; Polak-Springer, 2015, pp. 183–184). The latter, comprised of pre-war East Prussia, Pomerania, eastern Brandenburg, Lower Silesia, and the western part of Upper Silesia (or Opole Silesia), post-1945 became known as the so-called Recovered Territories (Ziemie Odzyskane) or western and northern territories (Ziemie Zachodnie i Północne, see Figure 1). Until 1970, when the authorities confirmed the Polish–German border on the Odra and Nysa rivers, the fate and future of the so-called Recovered Territories remained unknown, which facilitated a sense of temporariness (Thum, 2011, p. 187). This was contrasted with the actions of the authorities, through expulsions and migrations of the inhabitants, as well as restoration and development of the cities (Polak-Springer, 2015, p. 184).

In this article, the name "Recovered Territories" is used with the prefix "so-called" to indicate that the designation itself was politically and ideologically charged.

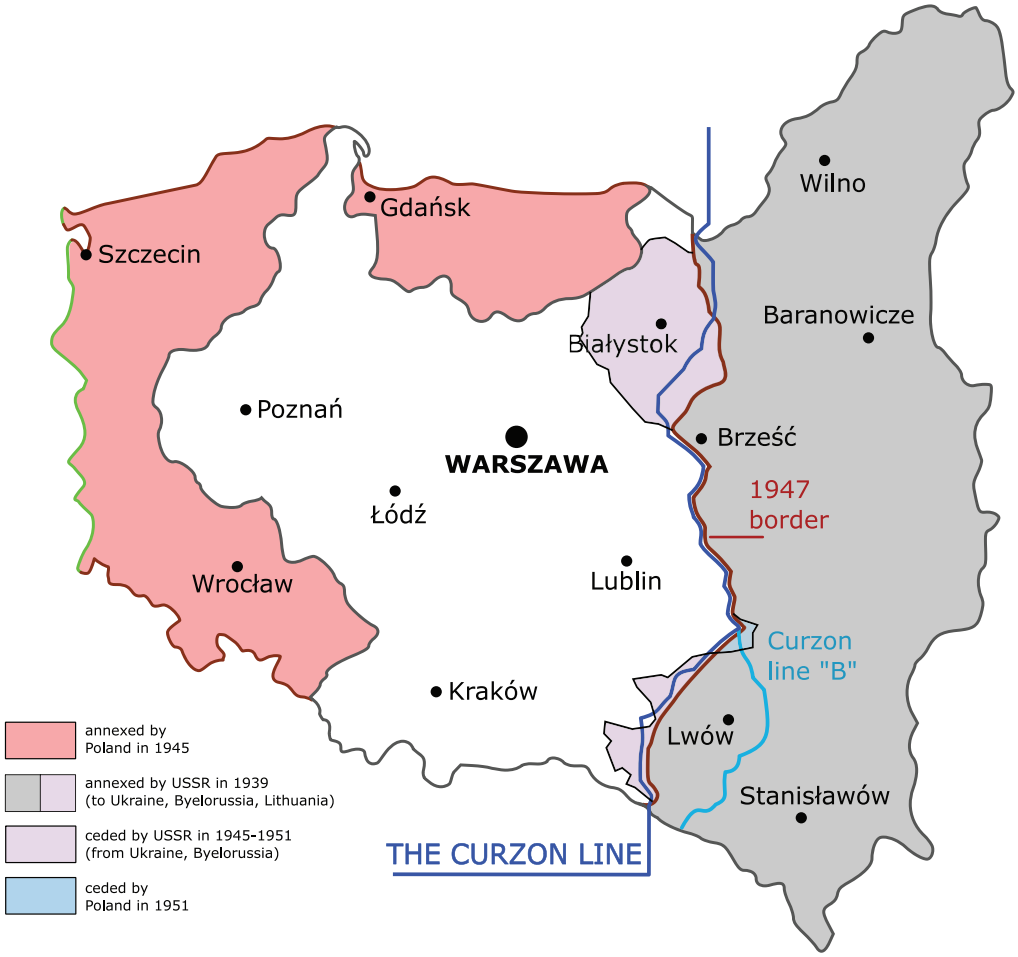

Figure 1. Map of the so-called Recovered Territories. Source: Wikimedia Commons (2007).

The processes of "recovering" those lands took place not only in the material realm. They were also apparent in new narratives created around those territories and cities, which were meant to undeniably prove that those lands were not incorporated into Poland, but "brought back" to the country as ethnically and historically Polish. In reality, those territories and cities, such as Wrocław (Breslau), Gdańsk (Danzig), Szczecin (Stettin), and Olsztyn (Allenstein), which were annexed into Poland after World War II, had been a part of Prussia or Germany for many centuries. Among the pre-war German cities, incorporated into Poland after 1945, was Opole (Oppeln)—a city now located in south-western Poland, approximately in the middle of the road between Wrocław and Katowice.

On the morning of March 24, 1945, a 71-person operational group from Katowice arrived in Opole. Their goal was to take over the power and administer the official tasks. Władysław Gliwiński, one of its members, recalled this moment as follows: "The city made a depressing impression. It looked as one pile of rubble around us" (Dziewulski & Hawranek, 1975, p. 414). Opole, whose streets were traversed by the operational group, was deserted and devastated. The destruction of the city in the first post-war years was estimated at more than 60% and tremendous damage covered the area of the city's historical centre.

After the seizure of power in Opole, the new representatives of the Polish administration faced the arduous task of rebuilding the city. The devastated city had to be rebuilt from the war damage to enable its daily functioning and for the new residents to settle. However, it was also crucial to create a narrative about Opole (and other cities of the so-called Recovered Territories) that explained why the city was incorporated into Poland. The break in the historical continuity and the exchange of power and population meant that the city's identity had to be recreated. As shown by the post-war history of Opole, this process was often associated with attempts to reinterpret the city's history or rewrite it.

The research on post-war architectural and urban development of so-called Recovered Territories has been centred mainly on bigger cities, such as Wrocław (e.g., Gabiś, 2019; Thum, 2011), Gdańsk (e.g., Friedrich, 2015), or Szczecin (e.g., Musekamp, 2013). Therefore, Opole was chosen as a case study in order to present those issues in the context of a smaller city and complement existing research concerning the post-war history of formerly German cities. Using an example of a smaller city offers a valuable perspective that has the

potential of enriching the discourse concerning so-called Recovered Territories with new examples of how architecture, urban planning, and built environment were used as political and ideological tools.

Opole can serve as an interesting case study also due to the fact that it presents both similarities and differences to other cities of so-called Recovered Territories. Firstly, it differs from other cities of those lands on the basis of its ethnic background. The region of Opole Silesia, similarly to the eastern part of Upper Silesia, is inhabited by the Silesians—an ethnic group indigenous to those lands. Thus, post-1945, the exchange of inhabitants in Opole and the region was not as extensive as in, say, Lower Silesia or Pomerania—many pre-war inhabitants remained in the city after its incorporation into Poland. Moreover, Opole's and the region's 20th-century history also differs from other parts of so-called Recovered Territories. After 1918, the Upper Silesia was the arena of the Silesian Uprisings—a series of three insurrections (in 1919, 1920, and 1921) which broke out as an effort to incorporate Upper Silesia into newly founded Poland. In a plebiscite, which took place in 1921, the inhabitants were to decide whether those lands would remain in Germany or be annexed into Poland. As a result, the Upper Silesia was divided between two countries: the eastern part (with Katowice) was incorporated into Poland, while the western part (with Opole) remained in Germany. Therefore, in that regard, Opole's 20th-century history bears similarities with both Upper Silesia (as the region was affected by the Silesian Uprisings) and Lower Silesia (as it remained German until 1945).

This article aims to present how the process of rewriting and reinventing Opole's history post-World War II was reflected in the architecture and urban fabric as it traces the relationship between the built environment and ideological and political discourses (Czepczyński, 2016, p. 8). Architecture and urban planning are analysed as a framework which materializes and stimulates certain social, political, and cultural processes (Czepczyński, 2016, p. 2). Opole can be analysed as a cultural landscape, consisting not only of buildings and spaces, but also representations of power, behaviours, narratives, and discourses (Czepczyński, 2016, p. 9). The notion of the city as a cultural landscape conveys the idea of a city as an entity: consisting of physical components (such as buildings, spaces, and places), relations between them and narratives about them which, altogether, emerge, disappear, and mutate over time. It also traces how certain events or processes—in this case, the reinvention of Opole's identity and history post-1945—are visualized and embodied in the spatial structure of the city, interwoven in its urban and architectural fabric (Czepczyński, 2016, p. 29). Changes in the urban fabric are inextricably connected to changes present in an immaterial realm: ideology, politics, and society. The biggest ones usually follow major evolutions or revolutions (Czepczyński, 2016, p. 3). That was also the case of Opole and both its post-war and post-German transformation. Analysing the city as a landscape allows us to see it as a multi-layered process, consisting of many different factors and occurring over a period of time. If the city is also analysed as a text, or a complex narrative (Kisiel, 2018, p. 7), then the issue of rewriting its history through the means of a built environment becomes much more apparent. In that way, post-war Opole can be interpreted as a sort of urban palimpsest in which certain elements (such as buildings or monuments) have been removed and overwritten by new ones.

Architecture, urban planning, and changes in the urban fabric participated in the post-war process of redefining the Opole's identity and rewriting its history. This issue is presented on the basis of four examples: the Market Square, Ostrówek area, the new centre of Opole, and the issue of destruction and creation of monuments. Selected examples of the existing architecture and places, such as the tenement houses of the Market Square or the archaeological site in Ostrówek, were reinterpreted as evidence of the city's eternal Polishness. Completely new architectural realizations also facilitated the creation of a new identity of the city, examples of which are the projects of the development of the Central Square, the new centre of Opole, as well as the Millennium Amphitheatre. Those were to create the image of metropolitan Opole, an administrative and cultural centre that, after 1945, flourished and developed. The shifts in identities and history of Opole are also materialized in the shape of monuments, which testify to the changes in the narrative about the city and region post-1945.

The topic of Opole's post-war architecture and urban planning have been presented in historical monographs (Dziewulski & Hawranek, 1975; Linek et al., 2011), scientific articles (e.g., Filipczyk, 2018; Szczepańska, 2021), and press articles. However, most of the aforementioned entries do not analyse and interpret post-1945 architecture and urban planning in relation to ideology, politics, and historical processes. In this article, the aforementioned literature is accompanied by source and archival materials that communicate certain narratives and demonstrate the complexity of the issue of rewriting Opole's history in regard to architecture, city development, and heritage. Those materials are represented by press articles (both pre- and post-war) and archival materials stored in state archives in Opole and Katowice.

2. Restoration of the Market Square

The post-war restoration of the Market Square in Opole serves as one of the best examples of how architecture was used to rewrite the city's history after 1945, in this case, through omitting or removing certain elements from it and adding or accentuating other features. As a result of the war, the Market Square is estimated to have been about 80% destroyed; hence it was classified as one of the most damaged areas in the whole city

and was described, among others, as "terrible rubble" with only a few surviving buildings jutting out from the debris ("Kronika miasta Opola," [ca., 1952–1955], p. 16). The post-war restoration of the Market Square was significant, not only in terms of its infrastructural and functional aspects but also in terms of semantic aspects as the historical centre plays a vital representative and symbolic role (see Figure 2).

The project of rebuilding the Market Square was made in Miastoprojekt-Południe by Stanisław Kramarczyk, Jan Olpiński, Czesław Thullie, and Marian Skałkowski (Łowiński, 1957, p. 170). The other institutions, such as the Department of Conservation and Protection of Immovable Monuments at the Ministry of Culture, the local conservation authorities, the Directorate for the Construction of Labour's Housing Estates (Dyrekcja Budowy Osiedli Robotniczych), and the group of historians supervised by the Ministry of Culture, were also involved in these undertakings ("Gdy ożyją plany i makiety," 1953, p. 3). The restoration of the Market Square took place between 1951 and 1955. At first, the southern frontage was completed in 1953 ("Kronika miasta Opola," [ca., 1952–1955], p. 39), followed by the northern and eastern frontages, which were completed the following year ("Kronika miasta Opola," [ca., 1952–1955], p. 64). At the end of 1955, the western frontage was the last to be brought back into operation ("Z realizacji programów wyborczych," 1955, p. 1).

The rebuilt tenement houses were intended to offer a modern layout of apartments (Petrus, 2009, pp. 146–149), with adequate sunlight and ventilation ("Gdy ożyją plany i makiety," 1953, p. 3), a sewage system, together with gas and electricity installations ("Opole z każdym dniem piękniejsze," 1953, p. 4). The emphasis on reconstructing historical façades with the aspiration to modernize the interiors, thus creating a dissonance between the interior and the exterior part, was a phenomenon typical of post-war reconstruction in other European cities. Most often, the historical buildings did not meet the modern requirements for insulation, ventilation, plumbing, and electricity (Diefendorf, 1993, p. 69). In the case of Opole Market Square, the modifications encompassed not only the interiors of tenement houses but also their façades. As shown in the archival materials, the pre-war housing structure in the Market Square was heterogeneous (see Figure 3). The tenement houses were distinguished by their size and stylistic forms. They were either largely historicized or built in a neo-classical style. As a result of the post-war reconstruction, these varied structures were replaced by unified neo-baroque forms. Therefore, the façades of many tenement houses lost their pre-war appearance (see Figure 4). It is worth mentioning that the façades which were most faithfully rebuilt were those of the pre-war baroque style. The exception to the discussed process of neo-baroque unification of the Market Square are three tenement houses on the western frontage (houses no. 1, 2, and 3), which were not destroyed during the war and retained their neo-style façades.

During the preparation of the reconstruction projects of the Opole Market Square, architects from Miastoprojekt-Południe could use the information on the history of its architecture from several sources: preserved buildings or their fragments, historical iconographic materials (engravings and photographs), and the expertise of art historians or an inventory of historic architecture, which was carried out in Opole at the end of the 1940s. Despite the wealth of resources and materials that could be used while designing the projects, the decision to reconstruct the architectural style and

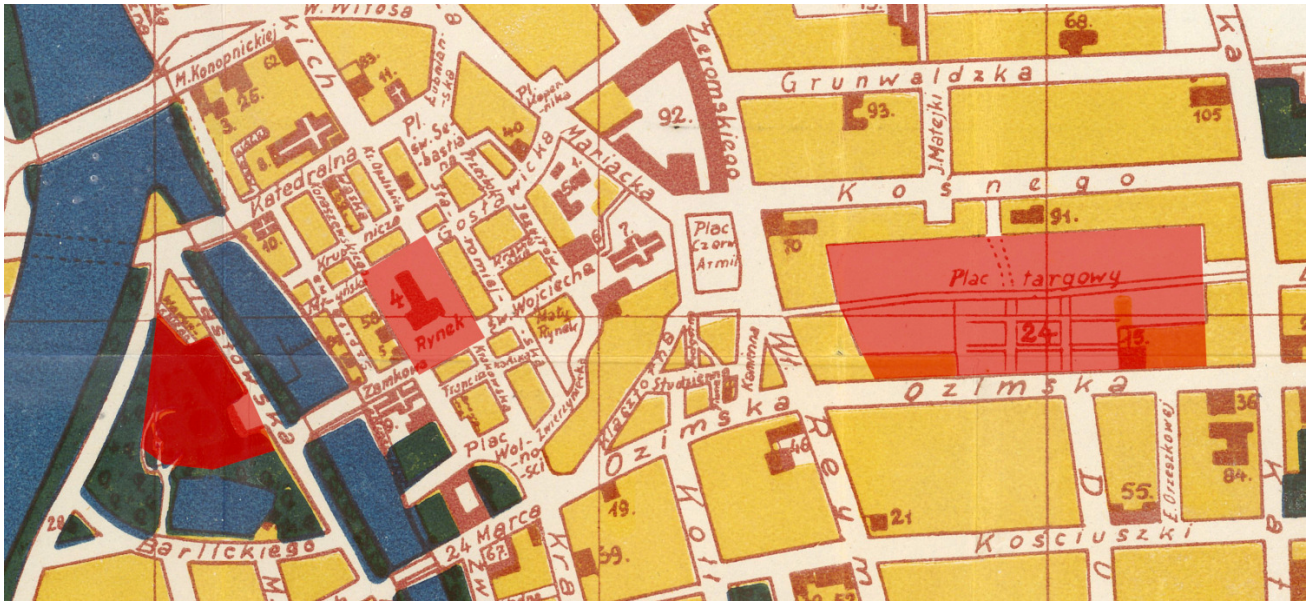

Figure 2. Plan of Opole from 1948 with highlighted areas of Ostrówek (left), Market Square (centre) and Central Square (right). Source: Streer (1948), highlighted areas by the author.

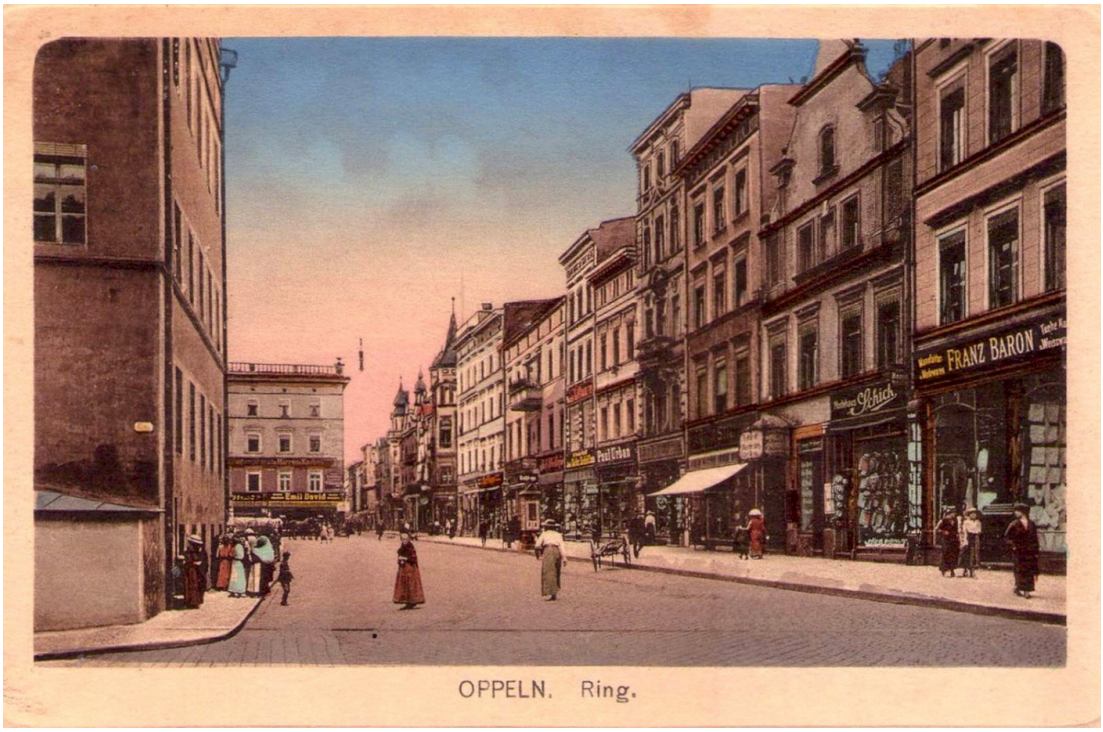

Figure 3. Eastern frontage of the Market Square in Opole before 1945. Source: Wikimedia Commons (2021).

Figure 4. Eastern frontage of the Market Square in Opole post-restoration.

forms from before their destruction had not been made. Instead, the decision was made to create a sort of architectural fantasy about the Market Square under the guise of bringing back its "old, historical appearance" ("Opole z każdym dniem piękniejsze," 1953, p. 4).

As explained in the local press, the primary pursuit during the design process was to bring back the "historical beauty of Polish as well as Renaissance and Baroque style of Opole" ("Na naszych starówkach," 1954, p. 6). Simultaneously there appeared to be a strong need to remove "foreign Prussian influences grounded in Berlin's pseudoclassicism from the Schinkel and Langhans' schools of architecture" ("Na naszych starówkach," 1954, p. 6); the ones that were considered as elements that "started to obscure the distinctive native Polish baroque style of a particular hue found in Opole" ("Na naszych starówkach," 1954, p. 6). It should be noted that the negative attitude towards the 19th and 20th-century alterations of the Old Town area in Opole was not an isolated phenomenon. Similar proposals to remove historicizing elements, considered "Germanic," were also voiced about the reconstruction of the Old Towns in other former German cities, such as Poznań, Olsztyn, and Gdańsk (Rymaszewski, 1984, p. 105).

The narrative created around the architecture of the Opole Market Square and its post-war reconstruction was, in fact, an attempt to rewrite the city's history, as the proclaimed "Polish" character of the baroque architecture in Opole did not align with historical realities. The baroque reconstruction of the Market Square, which, according to the underlying narrative, testified to the Polishness of its architecture, took place after 1739. At that time, Opole passed from the rule of the Habsburgs (up to 1742) to the rule of Prussia. Hence, historically it coincided with the times when the city did not belong to Poland (Dziewulski & Hawranek, 1975, p. 163). Because of the shift in borders and population exchanges after World War II, much of the city's pre-1945 history became foreign and difficult to identify with. Therefore, it was necessary to find a new point of reference, one which could testify that the city was "brought back" to Poland, expressing the conviction that these areas had long been Polish (identity and history wise) and that the change of borders in 1945 only testified to this fact. After World War II, the baroque architecture of the Market Square was reinterpreted as material proof of Opole's Polish identity, which predated the city's incorporation into Poland in 1945.

Post-war reconstruction of the Market Square in Opole served to create an entirely new vision of the city's past, in the light of which this area became a material part of the "Polish" baroque heritage, untouched by the German overhauls from the 19th and 20th centuries. This attempt to re-write the history of Opole through the post-war reconstruction of the Market Square can be regarded as successful because nowadays, most residents are not aware of how much the pre-war and post-war Market Square differ from each other, and the tenement houses themselves are considered to be of "historic" origin.

3. Ostrówek: Medieval Past and New Investments

Ostrówek is another historical area of Opole, in which the post-war process of reinterpreting history was carried out in order to create a new identity of the city. This area lies within Pasieka Island, located to the west of the Old Town (see Figure 2). Ostrówek, in terms of history, topography, and identity, is perhaps the most crucial part of Opole. In Ostrówek is where the first early medieval settlement and seat of the dukes from the Piast Dynasty were located. The importance of this area was also recognised in the interwar period. When the city became the capital of the Upper Silesian province, the authorities decided to erect an edifice of the new regency (*Neue Regierung*) in Ostrówek (Adamska, 2015, p. 9). Its construction was inextricably linked with the destruction of the Piast Castle, which was replaced by the new regency edifice. However, its modernist form, designed by architect Konrad Lehmann, conveyed a dialogue between the old and the new: a monumental complex, consisting of varied cubic components, incorporated, and presented the medieval Piast Tower as an important heritage monument (Störtkuhl, 2018, p. 320).

During the demolition of the castle in 1928, a discovery was made. The excavations revealed the foundations of the settlement that had existed in Ostrówek in the early medieval times (Sekcja Wydawnicza Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauki i Sztuki w Opolu, 1948, p. 10). Archaeological excavations following this discovery were used as a reason to search for the source of the city's identity and to investigate its origins. While at the turn of the 1920s and 1930s, the archaeological excavations were reported in the press in an enthusiastic but serious tone (the site was described, among other things, as an "archaeological sensation of Upper Silesia" and "Upper Silesian Troy"; "Das oberschlesischer Troja," 1930, p. 3), after the Nazis came to power one could notice significant changes in the narrative carried in press. At that time, one could read about "a rediscovered Germanic Opole" ("Auf den Spüren unseren Vorväter," 1935, p. 3), a place in which "Goths and Vandals once lived" or about the fact that "Opole stands on an ancient German settlement" ("Wo einst Vandalen und Goten wohnten," 1934, p. 5). Therefore, the press's role was to create a purposeful vision of the city's past, which would confirm the Opole's and Upper Silesia's German identity.

Archaeological excavations in Ostrówek were stopped in 1931 and resumed in 1948 when Opole had been a part of Poland for three years. The main goal behind the resumption of archaeological research was to prove the Polishness of the early medieval settlement, which was to directly condition the Polish identity of the entire city—the statements read: "We are in Opole, in one of the cities where the origins of the Polish nation lie" ("Sprawozdania z prac wykopaliskowych w Opolu,"

[ca., 1950–1951], p. 57). The need for impartial investigations justified the reason for Polish archaeological excavations as it was assumed that the pre-war excavations had been carried out in a biased manner and had distorted the actual image of Opole's past. In the opinion of Polish decision-makers, the artefacts found at the archaeological site suggested the Slavic (not Germanic) origin of the settlement. The pre-war argument about the Germanic origin of Ostrówek was, therefore, considered fabricated. According to this narrative, finding the remains of an early medieval settlement during the demolition of the Piast Castle was interpreted as another act of historical justice. This event, perceived in the post-war period as an act of violence towards a building considered to be a memento of the city's medieval Polish past, unexpectedly unveiled the settlement, which proved the historical Polishness of Opole even more clearly (Świejkowski, 1962, p. 13). The early medieval settlement in Ostrówek had become an extremely useful tool for creating and nourishing the idea that Opole had always been Polish. In post-war historiography, ethnic Slavs represented Polish pre-statehood, the reason why they were described, among other things, as "pre-Polish" (Urbańczyk, 2010, p. 203). Since the Slavs (treated in this narrative as the forefathers of Poles) founded the city, then "bringing it back" to Poland in 1945 had been the only correct solution from the historical and identity perspective.

In regard to Ostrówek, we can also see attempts to create the city's post-war identity through means of entirely new architecture; namely, the Millennium Amphitheatre, designed by Florian Jesionowski and Karol Róża. Notwithstanding, its full name is not accidental: this investment was a part of the broad celebrations programme of the millennium of the Polish state in the 1960s. In this context, the very act of calling this investment "the Millennium Amphitheatre" can be interpreted as an initiative aimed at, on the symbolic level, "bonding" the city with the rest of Poland by making the building a sort of offering of gratitude for the thousand-year Polish statehood. This can be well illustrated by the words of the Chairman of the Presidium of the City National Council, Karol Musioł, who announced that the partaking in the building of the amphitheatre by the inhabitants themselves would be "the most telling evidence of the attachment of the population of the Opolskie Voivodeship to their old Piast lands" and serve as "the best celebration of the millennium of our statehood" ("Budowa Amfiteatru 1000-lecia rozpoczęta," 1958, p. 2). The Millennium Amphitheatre created a new foundation of Opole's post-war identity that remains important even today. On its stage, the National Festival of Polish Song has been held almost every year since 1963. After the success of the festival's first edition, Opole has become known as "the capital of Polish song," which, to this day, serves as an advertising slogan promoting the city.

In the case of Ostrówek, the same events, places, and buildings were interpreted in contrasting ways. Archaeological excavations, which, in the 1930s, had been to prove Opole's unquestionable German character, after 1945 were meant to testify to Opole's Polishness ("Sprawozdania z działalności Komitetu Badań Naukowych," [ca., 1947–1955], p. 10). During the pre-war period, the demolition of the Piast Castle had been motivated by pragmatism. After the war, this event was interpreted as an act of violence committed against the architecture demonstrating the medieval Polishness of the city. New buildings, serving as physical representations of particular aspirations and convictions, also appeared in Ostrówek. It can be argued that those were, in a sense, commemorative in nature. The new regency served as a remembrance of Opole's promotion to the rank of the capital of the Upper Silesian Province, whereas the Millennium Amphitheatre was to commemorate the millennium of Polish statehood. At the same time, both before and after the war, Ostrówek was perceived as a source of Opole's urban and national identity. The very act of determining its Polishness after the war had far-reaching implications. The alleged Polishness of Ostrówek conditioned the Polishness of the entire city, which was crucial in establishing its post-war identity.

4. The Central Square and the New Centre of Opole: Competition With History and Aspiration to Become a Prominent Urban Place

The issues related to the process of recreating Opole's identity after 1945 can also be represented by new architectural investments and urban planning. One of the places subject to such undertakings was the Central Square, an area located to the east of the historic old town (see Figure 2), currently divided into Plac Teatralny (Theatre Square) and Plac Jana Pawła II (John-Paul II Square). In the 1960s, attempts were made to establish the new centre of Opole—a cohesive architectural complex located within the borders of the Central Square. As the name suggests, "the new centre of Opole" can be interpreted as a pursuit to create an entirely new architectural complex, functioning in some respects in opposition to the "old"—historical—centre of Opole. It can also be interpreted as another component of Opole's post-war identity as the actual capital of the region, a metropolitan and significant centre.

The first plans for the area's development appeared shortly after Opole's promotion (in 1950) to the rank of the capital of a separate voivodeship. At that time, this area was tentatively called the Central Square, which expressed the expected position of this place in the spatial structure of Opole (Filipczyk, 2018, p. 211). The main axis of this urban planning scheme was on Ozimska street—one of the city's longest arteries. The aspired plans for Ozimska street were overtly expressed in the local press. One could read that the artery was to topographically and symbolically link "Opole of the feudal, capitalist and socialist epochs" (Jassem, 1952, p. 3). At that time, the Central Square comprised facilities

such as a hotel, residential buildings, a university building, and the seat of the City Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party—the only finished building from the 1950s. Putting this building as a core of aesthetics signified an interdependence between urban planning and political issues. It was not the seat of municipal authorities (which resided in the Town Hall) or regional authorities (located in the new regency building) but the seat of the party's authorities that became the most crucial element of the Central Square.

After the thaw in 1956, the authorities returned to the idea of the Central Square as a representative area, this time with the help of modernist architecture. At that time, the complex was to include public utility buildings, such as a boarding music school, a department store, and an auditorium, all surrounded by residential buildings. The second dominant feature of the square, situated opposite the seat of the City Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party, was to become the edifice of the municipal theatre, which was planned to be erected in place of an unfinished pre-war building. At the beginning of the 1960s, the third attempt was made to yet again establish the Central Square complex. At that time, it was already assigned the name of the new centre of Opole, thus signalling the importance of this undertaking and its oppositional location to the old historical centre of the city. The project for this area, made by Zenon Prętczyński, Roman Tunikowski, and Ewa Cieszyńska (see Figure 5), was chosen as the one to be implemented (Filipczyk, 2018, p. 208). According to their designs, the area of the new centre of Opole was to consist of low-rise modernist pavilions and a group of skyscrapers, which were to be the dominant aspects of the vista. It can be argued that their height was supposed to compete with the church towers or the Piast Tower, thus expressing the tension between the new and old centre of Opole. The concept also planned to incorporate the previously designed new theatre building (by Julian Duchowicz and Zygmunt Majerski). The theatre itself was said to commemorate "the times of the Slavic Ostrówek, the dukes from the Piast Dynasty of Opole, the humanism of the Polish Renaissance, the longevity of the Polish language, the struggle of Polish patriots in Silesian uprisings" (Filipczyk, 2018, pp. 210–211). These words confirm the need to present the history of Opole only in the context of its ties with Poland—whether real or fictional.

Figure 5. New centre of Opole. Model of the area by Zenon Prętczyński, Roman Tunikowski, and Ewa Cieszyńska. Source: "New centre of Opole" [ca. 1962].

Post-war designs of the Central Square and the new centre of Opole area demonstrate the need to create a cohesive architectural complex, which, through its size, importance, and representative significance, could constitute a spatial and semantic counterbalance to the historic centre of Opole. The constant return to this idea in various guises and under different names reveals how important it was for authorities of the post-war Opole. At the same time, the new centre of Opole, unlike the "old" historical one, was not "burdened" by pre-war history, the problematic aspects of which had to be eliminated or reinterpreted. The strive for Opole to be a metropolitan centre can also be interpreted as a competition with the pre-war authorities, whose achievements were to be not only "followed up but even surpassed" ("Komitet Odbudowy Opola," [ca., 1948–1949], p. 13). In the context of the abovementioned undertakings, post-war Opole was to be an important administrative, cultural, and political centre, whose spatial development and architecture expressed the ambitions of local authorities.

5. Opole's Monuments After 1945

The shift in Opole's national affiliation in 1945 was also connected to the issue of modification or removal of the old monuments, and the construction of new ones. In Opole, this process can be traced back to 1945 and continues until the present day. The early post-war period was associated with wide-ranging undertakings linked with the so-called "de-Germanization" of the city—that is, the removal of German heritage. The demolition of the pre-war monuments is an example of these changes. German monuments were called "Prussian–Nazi," which signified the negative attitude of the new residents and authorities towards Opole's pre-war history and identity ("Sprawozdania okresowe o sytuacji miasta," 1945, p. 25). After World War II, of more than 10 pre-war monuments in Opole, only three were preserved; namely, the sculptural fountain on the Daszyński Square, the postal workers memorial of those who died in World War I, and

a Monument to Troops of the 63rd Infantry Regiment (Linek et al., 2011, p. 233). The last two, however, were subject to modifications—their original inscriptions were chiselled off. In this respect, their "de-Germanization" did not materialize in the actual disappearance of the monuments from the urban space but in the removal of the German language or obliteration of the primary meaning of the given monument.

Pre-war monument to Frederick the Great was considered the most important symbol of the German rule in Opole. After 1945, the ruler was named "the fierce Germanizer of Silesia" ("Kronika miasta Opola," 1958, p. 52). This term shows that, according to this narrative, pre-1945 Silesia was not a German region but essentially Polish and subject to gradual but planned Germanization by its authorities. On April 6, 1945, the monument was dismantled, and its subsequent fate remains unknown (Bogdoł, 2019). Another important monument that testified to the recent German rule was the sculpture of the Prussian eagle, which had crowned the top of the Piast Tower since the 1930s ("Kronika miasta Opola," 1958, p. 39). During that time, the spire of the tower itself was lowered, which enhanced the sculpture's visibility in the city skyline. After 1945, this act was interpreted as a deliberate action aimed at blurring the original character of the Piast Tower, regarded as a material testimony to Opole's medieval Polish past. Thus, the decision to throw the eagle off the top of the tower, on a symbolic level, freed the monument from German power. Ryszard Hajduk, a journalist and historian, who witnessed this sculpture being thrown off, recalled that he was standing over "the fallen symbol of Teutonic pride," adding that "historical justice has been done" (Sylwester, 1962, p. 5).

The destruction and removal of monuments from the public space of Opole was an expression of a rupture of historical continuity, marking the break between the city's recent past and its present. People or events commemorated on the demolished monuments shaped the identity of the Opole's pre-war inhabitants but were unknown or foreign to the post-war city dwellers. After "de-Germanization," the city's urban fabric, devoid of unwanted references to the German past, had to be filled with new symbols in order to create a new identity of the city and its inhabitants.

The history of the unrealized monument of Liberation–Friendship serves as an example of how monuments took part in the process of redefining the city's history. The monument's purpose was to commemorate the "liberation of the Opole region from an age-old national and social oppression" ("Komitet budowy pomnika Wyzwolenia–Przyjaźni w Opolu," [ca., 1953–1955], p. 12). One of the versions of the monument, developed by Marian Wujek, Józef Niedźwiedzki, and Tadeusz Wencel, was to consist of a central figure adorned by bas-reliefs representing selected historical events—the 18th-century uprising in Opole, the Silesian Uprisings, the liberation of Opole in 1945, and the Six-Year Plan, among others ("Komitet budowy pomnika Wyzwolenia–Przyjaźni w Opolu," [ca., 1953–1955], p. 13). The events chosen to be portrayed on the monument illustrate the reformulation of the region's history. In light of this re-contextualization, the history of the city and region had become the history of the struggle for Polishness, existing since early modernity and manifesting in regular uprisings against German authorities.

The monument to the Opole Silesian fighters for freedom is another example of how the post-war narratives rewrote the region's past. The monument designed by Jan Borowczak was unveiled on May 9, 1970—on the 35th anniversary of the end of World War II (Filipczyk, 2015, p. 176). The sculpture, located in a central point of Wolności Square, depicted the Roman goddess of victory, Nike, sitting on an auroch or bison, which, according to the author himself, was supposed to symbolize "power, courage, and the nobility of the Slavic people'' (Filipczyk, 2015, p. 178; see Figure 6). Borowczak also said that the monument was dedicated to people who contributed to the "preservation of Polishness" of the region. The sculpture was meant to portray,

Figure 6. Monument to the Opole Silesian fighters for freedom.

in a symbolic way, "the history of Silesian Opole and its struggle for liberation;" hence, the dates of the Polish fights against the "Germanic invader" were placed (Filipczyk, 2015, p. 178). This vision of Opole's history, similar to the concepts of the Liberation–Friendship monument from the 1950s, was meant to present the history of the city and the region as a struggle for Polishness, which culminated in a victory in 1945 (described repeatedly as "the fulfilment of historical justice").

It is vital to point out that the attempts to re-create the history and identity of Opole through the use of monuments can be traced to the present day. Examples of this process can be two monuments devoted to the princes of the Piast dynasty. The first one is dedicated to Casimir I of Opole (the initiator of the city's location and the construction of the Piast Castle in Ostrówek), and the second one to Vladislaus II of Opole (the initiator of the construction of the Upper Castle). It is important to mention that the equestrian monument of Casimir I of Opole was placed in front of the southern façade of the Town Hall—precisely in the same place where, in 1936, the monument of Frederick the Great was unveiled (see Figures 7 and 8). In a way, both monuments perpetuate a post-war narrative, presenting the history of the city and the region as the history of Polishness. However, the unequivocally anti-German motifs depicted in the monuments created during the Polish People's Republic era were replaced by the affirmation of the medieval past of the city, still perceived by default as a synonym of Polishness.

6. Conclusions

The issue of reinventing or rewriting past and identity, presented in this article, was not only limited to post-war Opole—it was a widespread process that occurred across so-called Recovered Territories. The core argument of post-war identity of those lands was based on the conviction that they had always been Polish but "Germanized" over the centuries. The authorities, therefore, set themselves the task of extracting this Polishness from under the layers of "German traces" to reach the actual image and identity of the cities of those territories. New narratives, created in this process, were inextricably linked to changes on a material level. They found fertile ground as the change of borders, combined with the exchange of inhabitants, caused a break in historical and cultural continuity. Thus, the post-war vision of those cities' past, in

Figure 7. Monument of Casimir I of Opole.

Figure 8. Monument of Frederick the Great. Source: Wikimedia Commons (2012).

which one can find true, exaggerated, or completely false elements, has become the only valid one.

The "de-Germanization" process, exemplified by the destruction or modification of monuments and architecture, as well as the eradication of the German language from urban spaces, was meant to purify cities of so-called Recovered Territories of material references to its pre-war history and identity (Musekamp, 2013, p. 204; Thum, 2011, p. 277). In the case of Opole, the "de-Germanization" was represented by the destruction of monuments, dedicated to German rulers (such as Frederick the Great) and important events (such as World War I). It also encompassed the removal of German language from public spaces and monuments, which is exemplified by the removal of German inscriptions from postal workers memorial of those who died in World War I and a Monument to Troops of the 63rd Infantry Regiment. It is important to note that, because Opole was overtaken by the Polish administration as early as in March of 1945, those processes of "de-Germanization" of the urban space occurred much earlier and were carried out faster than in, for example, Wrocław (Thum, 2011, p. 267).

The conviction that the identity of so-called Recovered Territories had always been Polish required finding historical references that would support this claim. Thus, selected examples of existing architecture, places, and spaces were reinterpreted and assigned new meanings in order to emphasise new narratives about the Polishness of those cities. In the context of Recovered Territories, relics of material cultures of the Slavic peoples (such as settlements) or the Piast dynasty (such as churches or castles) were perceived and presented as undeniable proofs of those lands' Polish identity that can be traced back to medieval times. The process of anchoring the city's Polish identity in its medieval history can also be found in Opole. Archaeological excavations, carried out in Ostrówek, were aimed at proving that the early medieval settlement was founded by Slavic peoples, recognized by the post-war propaganda as the direct ancestors of Poles. Medieval architecture, exemplified in Opole by the Piast Tower, was also considered a material memento of the city's old Polish past. In the context of Opole, the baroque architecture of the Market Square was also assumed to be purely Polish, which influenced the decision to rebuild this area in neo-baroque forms. It is important to emphasise that this process was based on the manipulation of Opole's history, as the baroque overhaul of the Market Square took place in the 18th century when Opole had no ties to Poland.

New geopolitical circumstances required new symbolic markers to be created and placed in cities in an attempt to support narratives surrounding the so-called Recovered Territories. This new pantheon of symbols across all of those lands included references to the Slavic peoples, as well as the Piast dynasty. They were complemented by references to regional history, heroes, and events, which differed from city to city (e.g., Musekamp, 2013, p. 180; Thum, 2011, p. 303). In the case of Opole, references to regional history were materialized in statues of local rulers from the Piast dynasty, such as Vladislaus II or Casimir I. Because of Opole's and the region's 20th-century history, the Silesian Uprisings became one of the events that were often referred to in order to emphasize the notion that the city's strive for Polishness preceded the changes of borders in 1945. Monuments, such as the unrealized Liberation–Friendship monument or the monument to the fighters for freedom of Opole Silesia, presenting events such as the 18th-century uprising in Opole, the Silesian Uprisings, the liberation of Opole in 1945 and the Six-Year Plan, were supposed to strengthen the narrative about the history of Opole as the history of Polish people defeating German oppression.

The process of reinventing Opole's past and identity is also visible in new architectural investments carried out in the city after 1945. Due to their location and representative value, the designs of the Central Square or the Millennium Amphitheatre were to serve as evidence of the city's dynamic development after its incorporation into Poland. The examples of brand-new architecture and urban planning can also be interpreted as elements that create a different identity of post-war Opole as a city with metropolitan ambitions. They illustrate not only the tensions between the past and the present, the desire to surpass the achievements of the pre-war city rulers, but also the attempt to prove the significant position of Opole in the structure of the region and the whole country. After all, Opole was to be portrayed not only as an ethnically Polish city but also as a political, administrative, and cultural centre.

Opole can serve as a unique case study in the sense that it was one of the cities in which, after the change of borders, the total exchange of inhabitants never happened. As opposed to cities, such as Wrocław, Szczecin, or Gdańsk, where almost all of the pre-war inhabitants were expelled, many pre-war inhabitants remained in Opole after it was incorporated into Poland. Therefore, they became both reservoirs of knowledge on the pre-war Opole, as well as witnesses to the process of rewriting the city's history after 1945.

It can be argued that architectural and urban planning decisions made during the post-war period influenced the city landscape and perception of it to the present day. The "de-Germanization" of Opole (which encompassed monuments, language, and architecture) eradicated references to its centuries-long German history. In that sense, it can be said that Opole, like many other cities of so-called Recovered Territories, found itself in a situation of "cultural amnesia" (Czepczyński, 2016, p. 42), in which the past is reflected in the urban space only through certain examples, chosen carefully to attest to the Polishness of the city. Nowadays, the cultural, architectural and urban landscape of the city is perceived as something natural and transparent in its meaning. However, it is important to emphasize that the

current city landscape is a result of many decisions, made not only for utilitarian and pragmatic reasons but also political and ideological ones. Moreover, some actions taken by current decision-makers, knowingly or not, continue the process of reinventing Opole's past and identity. Examples of that can be found in references to the Piast dynasty, the medieval history of the city, and the emphasis on the history of the Silesian Uprisings as a sign of the region's Polish identity preceding its incorporation into Poland in 1945.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Barbara Szczepańska is an art and architecture historian based in Wrocław, Poland. She is a PhD candidate at the Institute of Art History (University of Wrocław), where she is currently preparing a dissertation concerning post-war architectural and urban development of Opole. Her research focuses on post-war architecture and spatial development in the context of history, identity, and politics. She works at the Museum of Architecture in Wrocław.