Urban Planning (ISSN: 2183–7635)
2023, Volume 8, Issue 1, Pages 165–168
https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v8i1.6828

Editorial

Bombed Cities: Legacies of Post-War Planning on the Contemporary Urban and Social Fabric

Seraphim Alvanides [1,*,†] and Carol Ludwig [2,†]

[1] Department of Architecture and Built Environment, Northumbria University, UK
[2] GESIS — Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences, Germany

* Corresponding author (s.alvanides@northumbria.ac.uk)

† The authors contributed equally to this work

Submitted: 11 February 2023 | Published: 23 February 2023

Abstract
Post-Second World War reconstruction is an important field of research around the world, with strands of enquiry investigating architecture, urban archaeology, heritage studies, urban design, city planning, critical cartography, and social geography. This thematic issue offers a critical statement on mid-twentieth century urban planning, starting from the period of the Second World War. We approach post-war reconstruction not only from the mainstream actualised perspective, but also considered by alternative visions and strategies, with an emphasis on empirically driven studies of post-catastrophic damage and reconstruction, implementing a range of different methodologies. In this editorial we identify two research strands on post-war planning of destroyed cities, one investigating the processes and practices of reconstruction and heritage conservation and the other assessing the legacies of planning decisions on the social and urban fabric of today's cities. These two strands are interlinked; early planning visions and subsequent decisions were dominated by contemporary concerns and political values, yet they have been imprinted on today's urban and social fabric of various bombed cities, affecting our urban lives. Thus, reconstruction strategies of destroyed cities should engage diverse voices in a broad dialogue through sensitive inclusion, as today's planning decisions have the capacity to define the urban and social conditions for future generations.

Keywords
building reconstruction; city transformation; damage maps; heritage conservation; post-war planning; social fabric; wartime bomb damage

Issue
This editorial is part of the issue "Bombed Cities: Legacies of Post-War Planning on the Contemporary Urban and Social Fabric" edited by Seraphim Alvanides (Northumbria University) and Carol Ludwig (GESIS — Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences).

1. Introduction

This thematic issue provides a critical statement on mid-twentieth century urban planning, starting from the period of the Second World War. It extends the accounts of Diefendorf (1990), Düwel and Gutschow (2013), and Pendlebury et al. (2015) by examining how the early planning visions and decisions have been imprinted on today's urban and social fabric of various bombed cities. Post-Second World War reconstruction is an important field of research around the world, with strands of enquiry investigating architecture, urban archaeology, heritage studies, urban design, city planning, critical cartography, and social geography. Yet, current events highlight the need to continue revisiting this area of research with renewed focus from different urban planning perspectives. This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Marshall Plan, a US programme

of financial aid introduced in 1948, designed to boost the economies of western European countries after the Second World War. Such historic events offer opportunities to reflect on the successes and failures of twentieth century post-war planning and reconstruction and how the legacy of war has shaped today's cities. Importantly, this thematic issue is being published on the anniversary of Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, a major escalation of the Russo–Ukrainian War, which started in 2014. In October 2022, Germany's government and the European Commission invited experts to an *International Expert Conference on the Recovery, Reconstruction and Modernisation of Ukraine*, calling for a modern-day "Marshall Plan" for Ukraine, currently estimated in excess of half a trillion US dollars by the World Bank.

Against this backdrop, it is critical to unpack the lessons from the past and draw useful insights to aid the future reconstruction of post-catastrophic and/or bomb-damaged cities, including Ukraine. It is therefore not only of contemporary relevance, but also timely to revisit post-war cities, re-evaluate the significance, quality, condition, and suitability of their reconstructions in the light of the present and reassess the urban and social changes that ensued. This thematic issue has a distinct European focus, covering different regions of Western, Central, and Eastern Europe. It includes contributions that examine post-war reconstruction and the politics of preservation/conservation, the (re)invention of cultural/local identities, including the movement of state borders (and peoples) resulting in reshaped political maps, as well as how the legacy of the urban fabric can be assessed using advanced spatial digital humanities methods. The articles published here cover two strands of enquiry on post-war planning of destroyed cities as we discuss below.

2. Reconstruction and Heritage Conservation

Post-Second World War planning began as early as 1943 but the exact period of "post-war planning" is rarely clear-cut, having no fixed start or end date. Some cities were drawing-up damage maps and reconstruction plans while the war was still raging but did not commence their reconstruction until years (sometimes decades) later. Across Europe various plans at differing scales (city, site, block, or building level) were drawn-up, but many were never realized for one reason or another. Unlike in the rest of Europe, British plans were re-cast as part of the formal "Development Plan" process, arguably "watering-down" some of the originally aspirational plans (Larkham & Adams, 2023). The development plans were required to have a particular format and a long lifespan with a strategic vision looking forward over 20+ years. While many towns and cities suffered considerable destruction in the Second World War, the extent of damage, re-planning processes, and actual reconstruction therefore varied significantly across Europe (Diefendorf, 1990; Düwel & Gutschow, 2013). The post-war periods, however, were for all affected cities "years of restabilization and demobilization, but also of change" (Stola, 2019, p. 31). In some cases, the recovery of cities is still ongoing, as Lorens and Bugalski's (2023) account of the reconstruction of Polish cities demonstrates. Moreover, the "post-war planning" that actually occurred was in many cases a continuation of earlier interwar plans, often spurred into action by the bombing of a city which acted as a catalyst for action. This remarkable era of historical investigation can therefore be considered on the one hand rapid and transformational, while on the other hand more gradual with less chronologically specific forms of change. The immediate post-war period tended to be characterized by the initial clearance of rubble, followed by more rapid-response emergency planning measures such as temporary accommodation to meet the urgent housing shortage. Subsequently, the reconstruction process was not just a moment of planning, rather an important instance of inheritance and preservation, as discussed in detail by Knauer (2023) focusing on Vienna, Austria. In this case, by highlighting individual buildings and the entire old town an attempt was made to influence the planning process, guiding the longer-term development of the city.

In other cases, the use of approaches such as "disencumbering" (Ladd, 2014)—treating isolated historic buildings as museum artefacts, rather than elements of urban landscapes—also played a role in the planned recovery, as demonstrated by Larkham and Adams (2023) in relation to proposed plans for Bath, UK. Post-war planning decisions thus extended not only to heritage-making moments, but also to influence actual conservation processes and practices. For example, addressing questions about whether damaged buildings should be restored or preserved, or whether destroyed buildings should be reconstructed/replicated. Replication of destroyed buildings was quite rare in Britain because of the strong influence of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and their strong anti-restoration views. However, such practices took place in other European cities and were quite extensive in Germany where a gamut of reconstructionist approaches can be observed. As Altrock (2023) argues, it is important to appreciate architectural values of diverse periods as legitimate parts of the complex history of our cities and not sacrifice them so easily for an uncritical retro-style urban repair. Linked to this, Vialard (2023) highlights how the reconstruction of an urban space must position itself in the face of its past and think about the history of the place, and how to respond to its destruction. Preservation of character is partially embedded and expressed in the physical characteristics of the urban tissue that includes the street, plot, and building patterns, while changes in the relationships of these three elements greatly impact the character of a city. Ludwig and Alvanides (2023) discuss this in relation to Nuremberg, Germany, where the careful consideration and retention of the existing urban morphology of the

city was a key success factor for the continuation of its traditional historical character, which is so valued today.

3. The Legacy on the Urban and Social Fabric

Following the Second World War bombings, most cities conducted audits of damage and presented the results visually in diagrams and damage maps, for specific purposes (rubble clearance, structural assessments, planning, etc.). Although such damage maps took various forms, using different scales, drawing techniques, and legends, and present information of varying quality and completeness, they constitute an important historical data source for wartime analysis (Elżanowski & Enss, 2021). These maps, alongside other wartime plans, were used by the actors of the reconstruction process to think more holistically towards implementing a collective vision, providing a basis to argue for the protection, restoration, or reconstruction of historic buildings. In Britain, it was this knowledge of the extent of loss that led to the process of identifying and listing significant historic structures, which became a ministerial duty from 1947 (Delafons, 1997). However, in addition to the historic urban fabric, post-war planning strategies also influenced the arrangement of today's land uses and the social fabric of cities, dictating where people are to live, work, shop, and how they are to move around the post-war reconstructed city. Particularly in Western Europe, modernist planners were driven by the ideas of the Modern Movement (promoted by the CIAM), which focused on the creation of a functional city, characterized by the zoning of land uses and prioritization of the private car. In this regard, the image of the city was "broken down into its constituent parts" (Chapel, 2014, p. 28), dimensions and spatial interrelations of the city were mapped, generally with the intention to look forward to a modern era, without much regard to the city's early evolution. Other cities implemented more traditionalist approaches to replanning by retaining the historic street network, apart from the widening of some streets to better accommodate vehicular movement and necessary minor adjustments to building footprints. Post-war planning strategies for Eastern Europe varied even further; a framework for understanding the contemporary urban design paradigms of Central and Eastern Europe is provided by Lorens and Bugalski (2023), who examine Polish cities facing unique challenges associated with the shift of borders and the relocation of entire communities, the so-called "Recovered Territories."

Using modern geospatial methods of analysis, we can identify the urban morphological traces of the legacy of different visions and approaches with the view of considering and assessing their value. We can identify patterns of land use, mixed-use and monofunctional areas, block typology changes (Ludwig & Alvanides, 2023), new street connections, and the intelligibility of urban environments, which all influence how we use space and ultimately how we live today. For example, while the introduction of new long and straight streets create clear thoroughfares and long vistas, improving the cognitive intelligibility of the city layout and facilitating navigation, Vialard (2023) warns that the creation of new connections that shift the centrality of a layout also create a disconnect from the past, which should not be underplayed. Through renewed research from today's standpoint, we see purposeful memorialization of bombed buildings, structures, and areas, historic spaces with contemporary uses, as well as forgotten places, longing for redevelopment. We see the surprisingly short lifespans of some post-war buildings and even of major infrastructure investments (Larkham & Adams, 2023) and growing debates around reconstructionism and such strategies to improve outdated modernist planning (Altrock, 2023). We see areas whose original post-war intentions are no longer applicable to the present-day vision for the area, for example London County Council's changing "cultural vision" and replanning of the London Dockers (West, 2023). We also see a redistribution of the social fabric of the city, the movement of state borders (and peoples), and the long-term impact of the associated de-heritagization and the use of planning and architecture to underpin the reinvention and reconstruction of local identities, as is the case with Opole's new geopolitical situation following the change of European borders in 1945 (Szczepańska, 2023).

4. Concluding Remarks

The collection of articles in this thematic issue draws out some important points for consideration. While the intentionality of the various post-war planning strategies across Europe are debated, the interplay between political and socio-economic priorities, dominant architectural styles, and redevelopment doctrines and practices played an important role. So too did the level of destruction, land consolidation issues, and the vision of the architect/planner in charge, as discussed by Vialard (2023) from the French perspective. Moreover, the reality in many cities was a messy, uncoordinated, incremental process, which needed to adapt to and negotiate the shortages of materials, funding, and construction workers, as well as the shifting political goals and uncertainties. In all cases, the process was dominated by contemporary concerns and political values: top-down, expert-driven designs and principles, which were communicated to a public that was not necessarily meant to influence them. The non-professional, local community input did not play a decisive role in Second World War reconstruction planning, yet the resulting urban fabric significantly affects the patterns of life for all who live, work, shop, and move around these cities. Thus, future reconstruction strategies of destroyed cities should, from the outset, engage diverse voices in a broad dialogue through sensitive inclusion. It has been shown how post-war visions (and needs) change over time, depending on contemporary socio-, environmental,

and geo-political contexts, and that many post-war constructions are today deemed no longer fit for purpose. As Larkham and Adams (2023) argue, one of the major challenges for contemporary planning and urban management across much of Europe today is to reassess its post-war urban fabric and space. With this in mind, not only are present requirements, styles, and trends important, but also the need to plan high quality, sustainable urban spaces that are flexible, adaptable to changing requirements, and built to last.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

References

Altrock, U. (2023). "Reconstructionism": A strategy to improve outdated attempts of Modernist post-war planning? *Urban Planning*, *8*(1), 211–225.

Chapel, E. (2014). Thematic mapping as an analytical tool: CIAM 4 and problems of visualization in Modern town planning. In G. Harbusch & M. Pérez (Eds.), *Atlas of the functional city: CIAM 4 and comparative urban analysis* (pp. 27–37). Thoth Publishers.

Delafons, J. (1997). *Politics and preservation: A policy history of the built heritage, 1882–1996*. Spon.

Diefendorf, J. M. (Ed.). (1990). *Rebuilding Europe's bombed cities*. Macmillan.

Düwel, J., & Gutschow, N. (Eds.). (2013). *A blessing in disguise: War and town planning in Europe, 1940–1945.* DOM Publishers.

Elżanowski, J., & Enss, C. (2021). Cartographies of catastrophe: Mapping World War II destruction in Germany and Poland. *Urban History*, *49*(3), 589–611.

Knauer, B. (2023). From reconstruction to urban preservation: Negotiating built heritage after the Second World War. *Urban Planning*, *8*(1), 196–210.

Ladd, B. (2014). The closed versus the open cityscape: Rival traditions from nineteenth-century Europe. *Change over Time*, *4*(1), 58–75.

Larkham, P. J., & Adams, D. (2023). Revisioning and rebuilding Britain's war-damaged cities. *Urban Planning*, *8*(1), 169–181.

Lorens, P., & Bugalski, Ł. (2023). Post-Second World War reconstruction of Polish cities: The interplay between politics and paradigms. *Urban Planning*, *8*(1), 182–195.

Ludwig, C., & Alvanides, S. (2023). A spatio-temporal analysis of the urban fabric of Nuremberg from the 1940s onwards using historical maps. *Urban Planning*, *8*(1), 239–254.

Pendlebury, J., Erten, E., & Larkham, P. J. (2015). *Alternative visions of post-war reconstruction: Creating the Modern townscape*. Routledge.

Stola, D. (2019). Borders. In M. Conway, P. Lagrou, & H. Rousso (Eds.), *Europe's Postwar periods — 1989, 1945, 1918: Writing history backwards*. Bloomsbury.

Szczepańska, B. (2023). Post-war architecture and urban planning as means of reinventing Opole's past and identity. *Urban Planning*, *8*(1), 266–278.

Vialard, A. (2023). Intelligibility of post-war reconstruction in French bombed cities. *Urban Planning*, *8*(1), 226–238.

West, R. L. (2023). Dockers in Poplar: The legacy of the London County Council's replanning of Poplar, East London. *Urban Planning*, *8*(1), 255–265.

About the Authors

Seraphim Alvanides is a social geographer, with expertise in quantitative methods and geographical information science. His substantive interests involve the analysis of large spatial data related to urban sprawl, active transport (walking/cycling), and spatial humanities. The question driving his research is to what extent the environment (broadly defined) influences the behaviours and outcomes of individuals and groups. He is co-editor of the journal *Environment & Planning B: Urban Analytics and City Science* and associate editor for the journal *Heliyon: Environment*.

Carol Ludwig is a senior researcher at GESIS — Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (Germany) where she manages the BMBF-funded project *Sozialkartographie* as part of the UrbanMetaMapping Research Consortium. She is an urban planner with professional experience in practice and academia. She held the positions of principal planner in local and regional municipalities in the UK and lecturer at the Universities of Northumbria and Liverpool. Her research interests include the synergies between urban transformation, planning strategies, and the theorization of heritage.