CHAPTER 6

The Global Phoenix: From Destruction to Reconstruction, 1945–60

'You have to give this much to the Luftwaffe: when it knocked down our buildings it didn't replace them with anything more offensive than rubble. We did that.' (Prince Charles, Mansion House speech attacking modern architecture and post-war town planning, 1987.)[254]

Introduction

Airborne destruction left large areas of towns and cities in heaps of rubble. Bombsites and ruined buildings created an almost apocalyptic landscape. All heavily-bombed urban areas faced significant housing shortages. Homelessness and overcrowding required immediate solutions. Broadly speaking, the years from 1945 to 1960 have been termed by urban and planning historians the era of post-war reconstruction. Alongside the clearing away and renewal of bombsites, government prioritised new housing

How to cite this book chapter:
Clapson, M. 2019. *The Blitz Companion.* Pp. 119–146. London: University of Westminster Press. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16997/book26.f. License: CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0

to address the accommodation crisis caused by both destruction but also the cessation of home building due to more pressing wartime priorities. New modern buildings and cityscapes were also embraced to promote visions of the future rather than remind citizens of the past. As Nick Tiratsoo argues, however, reconstruction was a *process*, involving politicians in central and local governments, architects, town planners, private interests and companies, and the wider public.[255] In a similar vein, Catherine Flinn argues that grand visions for post-war reconstruction were undermined by 'restraints and realities', a point she makes for Britain but which is relevant to all countries rebuilding themselves after 1945.[256]

In Britain, Germany and Japan the experience of reconstruction threw into relief the renewal of cities across the world. This chapter focuses upon key themes in their reconstruction, highlighting some key similarities and differences. It concludes by drawing out important global trends evident in reconstruction, and their interplay with national and local specificities in the reconstruction of bomb-damaged countries.

British Reconstruction

In May 1940, as Britain 'stood alone' against Nazi-occupied Europe, Churchill pushed through the Emergency Powers Act, empowering the state with unprecedented levels of control over both the public sphere and private lives. The extension of the state provided the broad context for growing debates about the need to plan. The government took on an enormous apparatus of powers from 1939 to 1940. There were ministries of supply, economic warfare, food, information, health, home security, labour, and works and buildings.

By 1941, as the bombs were still falling, a professional coalition of town planners, architects, politicians, civil servants, socialists, liberal reformers and left-wing journalists began to integrate the notion of a fairer society in post-war Britain with the re-planning and rebuilding of towns and cities. Following the 'People's War', nothing less than the modernisation of the built environment was promised as an essential component of the New Jerusalem, a brave new modern world that would arise from the rottenness of the blitzed and blighted city. Housing was at the heart of this reconstruction promise. A Mass Observation poll in 1945 found that homes and the need for many more of them eclipsed all other social policy issues among the British electorate. The Labour Party made the most elaborate promises for new-build homes per year, which goes a long way to explaining their election victory in 1945.[257]

A leading figure in the promotion of planning was Sir John Reith. The former director general of the BBC between the wars, Reith was an efficient administrator who became Minister of Works and Planning from 1940–2. Based in the bombed-out heart of the capital city, he famously called upon the London County Council (LCC) and other local authorities to 'plan boldly' when drawing up reconstruction schemes. Undertaken by the indubitably patrician architect-planner Sir Patrick Abercrombie, with the assistance of the architect J.H. Forshaw, the *County of London Plan* was published as early as 1943.[258] Its publication was promoted by the media and in exhibitions, signifying strongly to the public that this war would be won and a new London would be built from the ruins. Yet the *County of London Plan* was superseded by the much grander *Greater London Plan*, which also included the extensive suburban boroughs of outer London. Damage and destruction continued to be visited upon British

cities towards the end of the war by the vengeance weapons. The *Greater London Plan* called for not only the reconstruction of central London and the renewal of blitzed and blighted areas, but for large new flat-filled housing estates, and an extensive new road infrastructure across the capital city to accommodate the growing demand for motor cars. Significantly it also endorsed the principle of decentralisation: of thinning out the population of London by 'decanting' mostly working-class households to large new council estates (social housing projects) built in the countryside beyond London.[259]

Abercrombie and Forshaw took centre stage in the educational film *London: The Proud City* (1946). Made for the Ministry of Information it outlined the ambitious reconstruction plans for the capital city to any members of the general public who cared to watch it. Yet despite the emphasis upon public information, which was replicated in other cities across Britain, the majority of the public were more motivated by the need for housing rather than by participation in planning. Apathy and self-interest were more common than an active interest in urban renewal. Most people had experienced the war as an interruption into normality, and wanted a return to a comfortable private life as opposed to a new era of communal participation in architectural and town planning debates.[260]

Furthermore, despite the intellectual effort that informed the *Greater London Plan*, it was mostly never implemented. This can be explained to a large degree by the influence of powerful local landowners, party political differences on the LCC and continuing divisions between modernisers and traditionalists among the architects and towns planners of the LCC. The traditionalists wanted to rebuild in neo-classical, Victorian or Georgian styles,

not the modern functional buildings that Prince Charles would later attack in his Mansion House speech. Furthermore, smaller competing local borough plans and improvement initiatives helped steer the Abercrombie Plan onto the rocks. Only the aptly named Churchill Gardens in Pimlico, an estate of modern flats near the River Thames, stands as a testament to what might have been. The reasons for the failure reflect what Adams and Larkham term 'a lack of joined-up thinking', a pragmatic planning culture rather than a clear and efficacious framework for implementation. One of the largest-scale modernisations of any western European city, to be rebuilt out of blitz and blight, never came to pass.[261]

The major conurbations of Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester and the larger port cities of Bristol, Hull, and Liverpool, also required radical urban surgery after the war, as did the smaller port cities such as Plymouth, Portsmouth and Southampton. Medium-sized industrial cities were also re-planned as a consequence of the extensive destruction caused in 1940–1. Across Britain local authorities in blitzed towns and cities began preparations and plans for post-war rebuilding, although as Larkham and Lilley demonstrate, many local authorities did not produce plans at all.[262] A huge stimulus to post-war reconstruction planning was provided by the instigation of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1943. As the Allies laid waste to German cities from 1943–5, the Ministry of Town and Country Planning was laying the foundations for British urban reconstruction.

The Labour Party, converted to interventionist Keynesian economics, and committed to the social policy reforms outlined in the Beveridge Report, became the major political vehicle for the boldest vision of reconstruction. Many leading Labour politicians also had links with the garden city movement.[263] While the

Labour Party general election manifesto in 1945 made no specific promises about the imminent apparatus of town planning, the Labour government passed two important pieces of legislation that would frame the reconstruction of post-war Britain: namely the New Towns Act of 1946 and the Town and Country Planning Act of 1947.

The New Towns Act created the first wave of fourteen British planned new towns: eight were introduced around London to relieve 'blitz and blight'. The London new towns alone housed over a million people by the end of the last century, proving that the Blitz had accelerated a longer-term trend in urban dispersal.[264] Although the conflict from 1939 to 1945 had created the opportunity for a programme of new towns, decentralisation was not a new idea born of the bomb and the need for thinner cities. The garden cities of Letchworth from 1903, and of Welwyn from 1919, were planned and built as antidotes to suburban sprawl and the chaotic industrial centres. They provided working models for the post-war new towns.[265] The interwar years also witnessed official debates about and enquiries into the urban problems of overcrowded, insanitary and polluted areas of Britain's industrial cities.[266] During the 1930s slum clearance programmes made some advances, although Nazi bombs would prove to be an effective slum remover.[267] Building new homes beyond the metropolis proved cheaper, because land was less expensive.

The new towns were planned according to zoning principles. Unlike the mixed-use town and city centres that had grown up over centuries, employment and industrial areas were zoned separately from residential districts, in order to prevent noise and pollution within safe housing areas. Again, this was a principle which had been pioneered at Letchworth and Welwyn Garden Cities, and in a number of municipal housing schemes between the wars,

where housing was spatially separated from places of employment, and from the commercial activities of the town centre.[268]

Creating a sense of community in the new towns was an important element of social reconstruction. The residential areas were designed to American 'neighbourhood unit' principles, wherein facilities such as shops, schools, places of worship and recreational spaces were within walking distance from the front door. The neighbourhood unit was also viewed by socialist politicians as the right tool for recreating the 'Blitz spirit', the alleged mood of wartime unity across the class divide. As Lewis Silkin, the Minister for Town and Country Planning, argued to the House of Commons during the reading of the New Towns Act, the new towns were to be divided into neighbourhood units:

> each unit with its own shops, schools, open spaces, community halls, and other amenities. [I] am most anxious that the planning should be such that the different income groups living in the new towns will not be segregated. No doubt they may enjoy common recreational facilities, and take part in amateur theatricals, or each play their part in a health centre or a community centre. But when they leave to go home I do not want the better-off people to go to the right, and the less-well-off to go to the left. I want them to ask each other 'are you going my way?'[269]

Here in a speech to parliament was the idealised Blitz spirit of cross-class unity appropriated for a vision of egalitarian decentralisation. For Suzanne Cowan, however, politicians and planning officials often drew upon the myth of wartime unity to legitimise grand reconstruction schemes, despite little evidence of a galvanised egalitarianism within the post-war British class system.[270]

Meanwhile, what of the blitzed city centres? In the short term, even before the end of the war, prefabricated housing was introduced to whittle away at the edges of the housing shortage. Yet the wartime promise by Winston Churchill of half a million new 'prefabs' after the war was not met – only 157,623 had been built by 1949.[271] Even in towns which suffered relatively little bomb damage the moratorium on housing construction during the war led to the provision of prefabs as a temporary solution to the housing crisis.[272] But grander more permanent schemes were required. Many wartime and early post-war plans were drawn up for the bomb-damaged cities. Some were brave new urban worlds, grand visions for a modern townscape, which included the comprehensive redevelopment of bombsites. Others were significantly more modest in ambition, and across the country plans were implemented to varying degrees of success.

Classic examples of large-scale comprehensive redevelopment include Coventry City Centre, the Plan for Plymouth, the massive road-centred rebuilding of Birmingham, and the Barbican scheme in the City of London. The Barbican has been widely praised as a modernist vision for urban living. Drawn up by the architect-planners Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, it was a confident vision for city living to replace a massive bomb site. Completed during the late 1960s, hence later than most reconstruction projects, the Barbican may be viewed as a prototypical 'urban village' intended for 7,000 residents living and working in close proximity to the City of London. Its brutalist architecture and pioneering high-rise towers, however, have not been popular with traditionalists. Yet the quality of the buildings, and the success of the 'urban village' created there proved that large-scale planning superimposed onto an extensively bomb-damaged district, could work.[273]

In Coventry, the city centre was certainly completely redesigned and rebuilt according to the modernist plan by Donald Gibson. The reconstruction of this Midlands city was the most famous British example of comprehensive redevelopment. About 7 per cent of the city's housing stock had been destroyed by the Blitz so the council was under pressure to build lots of new homes, and quickly. Many living in Coventry yearned for a new city: 'The Jerries cleaned out the core of the city, a chaotic mess, and now we can start anew.'[274] The *Plan for Coventry* was being publicly discussed as early as 1942, and was steered into place after the war by a Labour council. Yet the new cityscape that emerged from the ruins threw into sharp relief the strengths but many weaknesses of modern town planning. By the mid-1950s Coventry had gained a smart new pedestrianized shopping precinct; modern department stores; an upgraded road system that replaced the mediaeval chaos of the older city centre, and large new housing estates comprised of terraced homes, semi-detached houses and blocks of flats. The new housing areas were designed to neighbourhood unit principles, as were the new towns, to foster a sense of local community. And in a gesture of confidence in the future, and of reconciliation with former enemies, the boldly designed new Coventry Cathedral was inaugurated in 1962, and is situated alongside the ruins of the older place of worship.[275]

Yet for many the city centre looked unimaginative and soulless, and by the 1970s it had a run-down appearance. As Tiratsoo has argued, the reconstruction of Coventry was influenced by a cautious socialist council during the early post-war years, by differences between the political parties on the council and their consequences for public expenditure, by financial constraints imposed from central government, and by conflict between the

different ministries in government. During the 1950s the Conservative government rejected some of the proposals in the plan because they were considered too expensive.[276] A new city centre was constructed in Coventry, but it was hardly an expression of the gleaming New Jerusalem promised by the Labour Party in its general election campaign in 1945.

The only other city of comparable size to be comprehensively redeveloped on such a scale was the port city of Plymouth, where the architect-planner Sir Patrick Abercrombie was given sway. Plymouth had experienced over 600 air raid alerts; over 4,000 people were killed or injured. Over 22,000 properties were hit, 4,000 of them completely destroyed.[277] The city appears to have avoided many of the difficulties and problems facing planners elsewhere. The powerful political dynasty of Lord and Lady Astor explains much of this success, as they supported the scheme. The plan was robustly modern, containing provision for new housing neighbourhoods, a rationalised road system for the city centre and the outskirts, and many modern public and commercial buildings. Today, Plymouth city centre is a conservation area. Conversely, in Hull, the Abercrombie scheme met the same fate as the *Greater London Plan*: it was never properly implemented.[278]

The picture was uneven across the country, but similar issues affected other significant reconstruction schemes in other towns and cities where the results were often disappointing. In Birmingham, for example, the chief planner and architect Herbert Manzoni completely re-planned the city centre according to the principles of zoning. The retail areas were pedestrianised; slums were cleared away and modern housing estates comprising both houses and flats were built. But it was the road scheme for which Manzoni's plan became famous. He was influenced by the Swiss

modernist Le Corbusier, who had called for the clutter of narrow courts and small streets designed for the packhorse to be swept away, to be replaced by modern streamlined thoroughfares to facilitate the ever-growing number of motor cars. The inner ring around the city centre and the dual carriageways from the centre to the outskirts of small streets were superimposed upon the bombed but historic landscape of urban-industrial Birmingham.[279]

The reconstruction of Birmingham continued into the 1960s, when the iconic new Bull Ring shopping centre was unveiled. Using oral testimonies, Adams and Larkham found that many living in Birmingham during reconstruction were impressed and proud at the new city arising from the ruins. Yet some memories were also characterised by nostalgia for pre-war Birmingham, and concern at the loss of surviving old buildings due to the radical nature of the plan.[280]

By the 1950s contemporary cultural critics bemoaned the slowness of reconstruction, but were also critical of the loss of the utopian vision at the end of the war. Bombsites were castigated as 'horrid empty spaces', haunted by the ghosts of the dead and of the communities that had existed before the bombs.[281] The bombsites around St Paul's Cathedral, for example, were flagged by critics of the government as proof that Britain was too slow to rebuild.[282] It also appeared to have become not a vibrant egalitarian urban public community but a shabby inward-looking suburbia, the very thing that Angus Calder and others hated so much. This was 'subtopia', the disappointing reversal of the utopia that many had expected in 1945.[283] Yet there were good reasons for this. Many plans were quite humdrum. Other more ambitious visions for a brave new urban landscape were tempered by

financial constraints, by conflicts of interest between public and private organisations, by the changing political composition of the local councils, and sometimes simply because of a shortage of construction materials. A similar story unfolded in other countries

The Reconstruction of Urban Germany, 1945–60

> For ordinary Germans, the first priority was to clear the streets, and make houses habitable where it was possible, make new ones where it was not, and repair the utilities. But how? A fifth of the nation's men were dead, many were injured, traumatised, incapable of working: who was going to embark on the Herculean task of simply clearing the rubble from the endless ruins?[284]

The answer to the question lies partly in the German nation, but also in the United States of America, and to a lesser degree the British and the Soviet Union. Each of these powers controlled zones of occupation in a defeated Germany.[285]

As Jeffry Diefendorf has argued, possibly the biggest problem facing the post-war reconstruction of Germany was the absence of any effective German state until 1949, and therefore the dearth of any national framework of reconstruction.[286] The USA was the wealthiest of the occupying powers, but any notion that the Americans footed most of the bill for urban reconstruction is false.[287] In the contexts of housing construction, and the large scale rebuilding of bombed-out urban areas, the imprint of the American Military Government on urban Germany remained surprisingly modest. German reconstruction demonstrated some compelling similarities with the British experience. An obvious one was the pressing need for a massive house-building programme. Another

was the tension between modern architecture and town planning compared with widespread support for traditional and historicist urban designs (The opening quote by Prince Charles shows him to be a traditionalist with historicist leanings). A further key similarity was the role of many different agencies and organisations seeking to influence or modify town plans.

Air raids on Germany left not only the built environment but the political structures of Nazism in ruins. The Americans attempted to modernise and democratise German town planning, within the wider context of political re-education and economic re-modelling. This created a tension between American forward thinking and a more conservative culture of German aspirations for the urban future. Within the context of rising tensions between the American and the Soviet zones in early post-war Germany, the US Military Government invited the leading modernist architect and town-planning consultant Walter Gropius to Berlin in August 1947. An émigré to the USA from interwar Germany, Gropius argued perceptively that 'there is a political corpse buried in Germany's rubble, and it is the job of reconstruction planners to ensure that it isn't revived.'[288] Viewing urban modernisation as compatible with democratisation, Gropius favoured the American small town ideal, with its open meetings and apparently active levels of neighbourliness and political participation.[289]

Urban planning and development in Germany had long been dominated by powerful local elites and a bureaucratic apparatus that the USA was barely able to modify. This was partly about American priorities, as urban policy was 'never a central concern' compared with the wider rehabilitation of democracy and the German economy.[290] But the severe housing shortage required urgent attention. The failure of the Nazi regime to provide a

major house-building programme, and the influx of refugees, exacerbated the shortage of homes caused by air raids. It took Marshall Aid to kick-start the much-needed housing programme in West Germany, along with deficit financing.[291] Even then, the US administration was fairly modest in its investment. West Germany received $1,472 million in economic aid, significantly less than Great Britain or France, and only some of that was allocated for physical reconstruction.[292] There were also significant cultural and material differences between the Americans and Germans over the types of homes to be built. The US favoured the exporting of many modern prefabricated homes to Germany, and the use of lighter building materials, such as wood. The Germans preferred more solid traditional masonry and stone. As Diefendorf shows, however, the American authorities did manage to promote the building of cheaper modern houses and apartments. The construction of mass housing also assisted the recovery of the shattered German economy.[293]

Germany was not the sole preserve of the US Military Government, however. While the British, bankrupted by the war, were much less able to forge the modern future of Germany through finance and global influence than the USA, they were more energetic when it came to promoting a more centralised yet democratic town planning apparatus. In Hamburg, western Germany, where over 25 per cent of housing was damaged or destroyed by the Allies, post-war plans were already being drawn up before the war ended. The modernist planner Konstanty Gutschow, who had cooperated with the Nazis in urban design, was instrumental in drawing up a plan which decentralised a significant section of the population to a new 'city' alongside the River Elbe. The road system was modernised, including an autobahn ring road around

Hamburg. More green spaces were planned, and the housing shortage was addressed through a construction programme of high-density town housing and apartment blocks. The plans were completed after the war but were not as fully implemented as Gutschow would have liked. Nonetheless, Hamburg adopted a more comprehensive modern plan when compared with other German cities.[294] All across Germany, however, tensions between traditional rebuilding with historic-looking buildings and the pre-war street pattern versus a more modernist template permeated the architectural and town planning professions in Germany. This tension was also evident in German public opinion.

Public buildings in the smaller chocolate-box cities such as Lubeck were reconstructed to re-capture their historical heritage. This is termed facsimile reconstruction, where the emphasis of rebuilding is on continuity and the reminder of the past.[295] Hence in Munster, the town hall or Rathaus was rebuilt to resemble its pre-war medieval glory. This was referencing a romantic view of the past which many modernisers and American officials were suspicious of. Hence in other larger cities what Diefendorf terms 'the reconstruction of civic authority' meant bringing legitimacy to local government administrations many of whose personnel were associated with Nazi activities and oppression before liberation at the end of the war. In Stuttgart the nineteenth-century town hall was destroyed by bombing, and following a competition among local architects for the best design, in which no clear winner emerged, during the early 1950s the Lord Mayor pushed for a more modern design to represent the new city being built from the rubble, and the post-war spirit of democracy.[296] Nazi Germany had of course been a police state, so in some cities new police headquarters were also built to represent a break with the

recent past. In Cologne an austere but elegant police building was opened in 1955. Praised by leading architectural and planning experts, the design was less popular with the mainstream media. And as Diefendorf argues, a distinct lack of public engagement in the merits or otherwise of the Police HQ possibly implied a reluctance to engage with the nature of policing under the Third Reich.[297]

In many major German cities the popular desire for historical continuity reflected a preference for the known and familiar city of the pre-war years. In Cologne in central Germany, and Munich, in the Bavarian Deep South, public opinion and many leading local professionals and organisations favoured an emphasis upon re-building to the traditional cityscape. Although this did not always occur, and many unpopular modern buildings were constructed, post-war re-planning emphasised the need to resurrect the character of vernacular architecture and the symbolic local and national importance of grandiose monumental buildings. In Cologne, furthermore, the Catholic Church assumed responsibility for repairs to the many churches damaged by the Allies. As Diefendorf argues, today some central city churches are underused, 'but they do constitute dominant features in the old heart of the city.'[298]

Among the most difficult urban reconstruction processes was that of Berlin, the ancient Prussian capital and the seat of Nazi power since 1933. Alongside the need to remove the imprint of the Third Reich, Berlin faced significant problems. Environmentally, the extent of its destruction was 'staggering'. Politically and administratively, Berlin was divided between East and West by 1949.[299] Hence post-war planners viewed the extent of the destruction as a significant opportunity to liberate Berlin from its reactionary

past, and to create a visionary new modern city. As in other cities across Europe, however, grand ideas were confronted by practical difficulties. The Americans injected huge sums of reconstruction capital into West Berlin during the 1950s, following partition, prioritising modern factories, offices, retail and hotels. Housing was less of a priority, and the entrenched influence of traditionalists in town planning and architecture departments often acted as a bulwark to the modernisation project of the USA.[300]

In East Berlin, by contrast, austere modern buildings, workers flats and wide boulevards, notably the Stalin Allee, were viewed by many modernists on both sides of the Iron Curtain as an impressive modernisation of the urban landscape. By the end of the 1950s, architecture and town planning had become a 'battleground' in the German Cold War, with East and West Berlin trying to outdo each other with competitions for the regeneration of city districts. And in a belated, unwitting admission that prefabrication was required in communist East Germany, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev called in 1954 for less-boastful Stalinist buildings and a drive for prefabrication and modern materials to address the lingering housing shortage.[301]

In East Germany, those living within the Soviet zone of occupation developed a more centralised and straightforward if undemocratic apparatus for reconstruction even before the establishment of the GDR in 1949. Following the passing of the 'law for rebuilding the cities of the German Democratic Republic and the capital of Berlin' in September 1950, the East German state undertook something of a land-grab of private holdings and property, often without compensation. Privately-owned housing was allowed to continue, but much of the land was nationalised.[302] In 1951, key areas of cities were designated for large-scale

reconstruction plans. Properties required for reconstruction purposes were requisitioned by the Ministry for Planning, Building and the Building Industry. 'Derived in part from Soviet models' the GDR principles of reconstruction adopted a very different model from West Germany:

> They called for the immediate repair of designated war-damaged urban areas, restoring certain monuments of 'national' cultural importance, such as the Zwinger in Dresden, and construction representative arteries such as the Stalin Allee (later Karl-Marx-Allee) in Berlin. The sixteen principles called for the rebuilding of compact, dense cities with monumental, representative forums in modern form, including magisterial avenues and towers to serve as cultural centres and sites for political demonstrations. Clearly defined city centres and major squares were to define cities that were technically modern and socially responsible, reflecting the aims of the new socialist society.[303]

Hence communist reconstruction emphasised the unifying and symbolic importance of shared public space to a much greater degree than the West. Planners and politicians looked forward to 'model socialist cities' defined by a public socialist urbanity rather than Western privatism or the fascism associated with pre-war German cities. Dresden, to take a key example, saw some of its older central areas rebuilt within the German baroque style. City squares were redesigned to emphasise their public function, while some key buildings were left in ruins as reminders of what the Anglo-American Allies had inflicted upon the city, notably the *Frauenkirche*. Large-scale plans for Soviet-style blocks of worker's flats around the city centre were implemented to varying degrees, partly due to a failure by the local authority to fasten upon and implement a single strong plan. Even in a country with ostensibly

more powerful governance, bold schemes were not always fully realised.[304]

Ultimately, how successful were German reconstruction efforts? As Diefendorf argues, there were many disappointments after 1945, evidenced by the failure to enact visionary plans, a rash of modest or unpopular houses and commercial and public buildings, and a sense that much of the fifteen years to 1960 had been a missed opportunity. On both sides of the German border the housing problem was close to a solution by the late 1950s, however: many significant housing programmes had created large residential areas of light, airy and often spacious apartments and town houses.[305]

Reconstructing the Japanese City, 1945–60

Partly in common with Germany, Japan was an 'occupied' country under the political and military jurisdiction of America until 1952.[306] An awesome task of reconstruction was initiated, demonstrating some key similarities with house building programmes and urban repairs in other countries. But this chapter also focuses upon the unique nature of Japanese urban rebuilding in the devastated landscapes of conventional and atomic bombing.

As Tiratsoo and his co-writers have argued, over 200 towns and conurbations in Japan were bombed by the Allies in the Second World War, and 115 of them were later officially designated as 'war-damaged cities':

> By the time the conflict ended in 1945, destruction was immense: approximately 2.3 million houses (or 20 percent of the stock) destroyed or seriously damaged; 63,000 hectares of land burnt out; 330,000 persons killed

> and a 426,000 injured. The large cities were particularly badly affected. Tokyo suffered most, with 712,000 housing units damaged, followed by Osaka (311,000), Kobe (128,000) and Yokohama (98,000).[307]

The accomplishment of reconstruction was also immense. As Carola Hein argues, 'Japan's cities have risen from the utter destruction of the Second World War with astounding speed.'[308] In the immediate aftermath of war hundreds of thousands of wooden temporary homes were constructed, but in common with the prefabs in Britain and in other countries, these were mere patches over a critical nationwide housing shortage. Most of the reconstruction projects in Japan were pragmatic and piecemeal, concerned to provide low-rise cheaply-built wooden housing, erect new public and commercial buildings, and renew roads, railways and manufacturing plants. A much larger solution was required for the longer term, hence in December 1945 the National Government had established the guidelines for the Policy for the Reconstruction of War-Damaged Areas, embracing building methods, land-use planning, modern construction materials and higher construction standards.[309] Its record would prove to be uneven.

The reconstruction plans for Tokyo and Osaka, both large conurbations, were initially ambitious but, in common with the Abercrombie Plan for London for example, went largely un-realised. The reconstruction of smaller cities in Japan demonstrated some important similarities with post-war planning projects in other countries, while highlighting some specificities of the Japanese path towards urban modernisation in the decade following the end of the Second World War. The vast majority of the millions of homes built during the reconstruction era of 1945–55

resembled much of the pre-war housing destroyed by conventional and atomic bombing: 'flimsy wooden constructions and slum-type housing dominated many areas until the 1960s.' The modern high-rises and the emergence of mass apartment-style housing now so prominent in Japan was a product of the 1960s and since, not the era of reconstruction.[310]

Under the auspices of the Americans, the Japanese Cabinet appointed the War-Damage Rehabilitation Board (WRB) in October 1945 to oversee reconstruction and in particular accelerate the drive to build much-needed homes. Local newspapers in Japan were important voices both in promoting public interest in re-planning and in calling for local needs to be addressed as quickly as possible.[311] Town planning was not only a local and national activity. International diffusion of town planning and architectural theories and concepts between the wars had influenced pioneering modern Japanese town planners. The post-war planning of Tokyo, for example, was led by Hideaki Ishikawa, a long-standing head of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government town planning department. He had been active in overseeing the enactment of the Air Defence Act (1937) for the capital city, which called for more open spaces to be given over to military use, and for the arrangement of evacuation procedures, fire-fighting and other aspects of the civil defence apparatus. After the devastation wrought by the USAAF over Tokyo, Ishikawa drew up the post-Blitz comprehensive plan, calling upon Anglo-American town planning principles that emphasised zoning, neighbourhoods, and road planning for motor traffic. A significant improvement to the badly damaged railway network was also called for. The Tokyo Local Town Planning Committee first met in March 1946 and worked with the WRB, other government ministries, and

private and commercial organisations, to promote house building and the new plan. But implementation problems soon arose. Despite the efforts of newspapers, public involvement in planning was 'very limited', echoing British experience. The WRB was sometimes riven with tensions between new post-war officials suspicious of continuing pre-war civil servants associated with the militant nationalism of the 1930s. The organisation sometimes also suffered with insufficient funding from government, which affected its ability to negotiate land-readjustment schemes required for new-build, and a close relationship with local town councils and prefectures was not always forthcoming.[312] Only one third of the destroyed homes in Tokyo had been rebuilt by 1949. An Emergency Housing Plan of 1945, furthermore, to provide over 300,000 emergency prefabricated homes was largely a failure by 1949.[313] And in that year the so-called 'Dodge Line', a new financial regime imposed by the USA, also cut back on reconstruction expenditure. Tokyo had hardly advanced in the years since 1945, except for the growing sprawl of cheap housing, often in shanty towns and overcrowded residential areas, to accommodate the homeless, and the growing number of Japanese families.[314] Hence reconstruction enables us to understand why, today, 'Japan's large cities are made up of dense, vital, apparently unplanned neighbourhoods.'[315]

The re-planning of Osaka, the 'second city' of Japan, shared some key similarities with Tokyo. Osaka was the leading and industrial and commercial centre in Japan by 1939, subsequently enduring over thirty heavy bombing raids in 1945. Osaka lost over 310,000 homes and over 50 square kilometres of the built-up area were damaged or destroyed. As in Tokyo the local version of the newspaper *Asahi Shinbun* began a series on the need for reconstruction as early as August 1945, and ambitious plans for a

bright new Osaka were drawn up. These were to be implemented by the City Corporation Reconstruction Section, the Osaka Local Town Planning Committee, the WRB and various government ministries. Yet conflict between the different wards, tensions between more cautious conservative politicians and the socialist mayor, and shortages of labour, material and money conspired to reduce the effectiveness of the plans by 1950.[316]

The re-planning of metropolitan Tokyo and Osaka was vastly different in scale to reconstruction in smaller provincial cities, yet bold visions for smaller urban centres in Japan were also modified by time and process. Nagoaka, an inland city with a population of less than 75,000 people in 1945, was visited by the USAAF on the first two nights of August 1945, razing most of the city centre to the ground. Almost immediately after the war's end planning became an important subject of local debate, with the original schemes calling for comprehensive land-use planning and a more modern cityscape. A Reconstruction Measures Committee for Nagoaka was established. Local newspapers enthused about the new vision. The plan was originally based upon rigid zoning between residential, 'exclusive commerce', commerce, heavy industry, light industry, railways, public buildings and new green spaces. A new commercial district in the centre, high-density dispersed residential areas towards the outskirts, and upgraded roads and railways were at the heart of the plan, which was approved by the WRB in July 1946. Divisions between the planners, however, a sometimes dilatory attitude by local authorities, and obstinate landowners objecting to land-use changes, all led to modifications in land-readjustment, street layouts, and a reduction in the original scale and scope of the plan. Nagaoka was declared the first Japanese city to be reconstructed by 1953, but in reality the process was by no means ended.[317]

Difficulties in implementation affected other medium-sized Japanese cities. At Maebashi, for example, an original plan was drawn up by Kenzo Tange, who would go on to design the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park, and become one of the most influential modern architects in Japan. Yet public distrust and even opposition to his plans, financial concerns, anger at compensation payments for land-use changes, and also the 'folly' of wide new roads which evidenced a possible cultural affection for the older pre-war street pattern, encapsulated public suspicions, many of which were aired in open meetings. It took a more united front between the city council, the WRB and the Ministry of Construction, based in Tokyo, to get a less illustrious plan implemented by the mid-1950s.[318] And in Sendai, early post-war planning for the width and route of a major stretch of road revealed sharp differences in public opinion, the power of vested interests of local landowners, and local scandals over funding and bribery.[319]

In common with Germany, the renewal of cities and the construction of public buildings to promote a newer more democratic urban society was often a delicate matter. Japanese national pride had been severely wounded by the defeat, and grand symbolic reconstruction projects symbolising modernity, or an 'out-with-the-old, in-with-the-new' mentality were not deemed appropriate. As Hein argues, this was in contradistinction with some of the bolder urban renewal schemes in heavily-bombed European cities in the Netherlands and Poland.[320]

Reconstruction: Some Wider Conclusions

The built environments of Britain, Germany and Japan were ostensibly 'reconstructed' by the end of the 1950s. In each country,

despite the difficulties outlined above, the housing shortage had been addressed, but by no means completely solved. In Britain, the Labour governments of 1945–51 failed to build enough houses, a reason why Labour lost the general election in 1951. Conservative governments of the 1950s prioritised home building, with some success.[321] In East and West Germany, an impressive number of homes were built by 1960, and in Japan piecemeal urban extensions and myriad planned new suburban settlements mostly accommodated a rapidly growing post-war population.

In post-war Europe, urban reconstruction also played a significant role in the modernisation of urban landscapes, and in stimulating economic growth through the multiplier effect of large-scale construction industries demanding primary and secondary goods and a massive labour supply. In Germany, however, as in Japan, the rebuilding of the bombed-out towns and cities possessed other layers of significance. A new urban environment was part of an American project to remodel former reactionary systems of rule, and the citizenries under them, into democracy, modernity and prosperity. This powerful synthesis of post-war imperatives was intended to negate atavistic politics and more immediately to act as a bulwark to communist influence during the early Cold War.

Key themes and issues in reconstruction identified in Britain, Germany and Japan also moulded the character of reconstruction in two countries with political traditions of strong state intervention, namely Soviet Russia in Eastern Europe, and France in the west. In France, the state took a more consistent centralist and managerial position towards reconstruction project areas. In the heavily-bombed north-east, the French Minister for Reconstruction deemed the Alsace-Lorraine region to 'have suffered most of

all'.[322] Yet even in the country of the *grand projet*, a combination of practical and political problems mediated the outcomes. As Hugh Clout argues, 'before definitive reconstruction might begin':

> a vast array of emergency tasks had to be accomplished, which included investigating the extent of the damage, organising labour, clearing rubble and ruins, making urgent repairs, installing temporary accommodation, employing architects and planners to prepare master plans [and] finding accountants to verify claims for compensation.[323]

A cultural preference for vernacular architecture in the Alsace region also undermined a much-vaunted plan for Saint-Dié, drawn up by Le Corbusier, but in the Lorraine by contrast reconstruction eventuated in a 'mundane functionalism' characterising much of the built environment by 1960.[324]

In the Soviet Union, following the 'Great Patriotic War' huge areas of urban-industrial regions lay in ruins. Stalin placed great emphasis upon social unity to act as the glue for what would be a vast reconstruction project across the war-damaged regions. In common with Britain, to a degree, victory became part of the 'foundational myth' for Soviet society, a celebration of triumph that was to transcend sectional differences and accompany modernisation. Yet the myth of national unity as a foundation for post-war reconstruction in Soviet Russia has been critically interrogated, with propaganda far in excess of popular enthusiasm for the wartime re-planning and reconstruction programmes.[325]

Soviet cities were planned to be standardised, but to include inspiring and rational spaces for a productive, engaged but never challenging proletariat. Across the communist world, post-conflict cities were reconstructed according to Soviet-style

planning principles. In Poland, for example, Warsaw had suffered terribly during the war. Its renewal was adopted by the Soviet authorities as a potent symbolic of communist renewal from the ashes of barbaric fascism, and as an egalitarian alternative to western capitalism.[326]

But socialist planning was also beset by internal divisions and practical problems across the eastern bloc. The plan for Warsaw 'was focused on the value of bringing back what was to be erased', namely the historical pre-war image of the city destroyed by the German and Soviet air raids.[327] In the port-city of Gdansk, by contrast, as with bombed-out maritime cities in other countries, reconstruction became a more nuanced process of balancing the pre-war heritage with 'the new urban thinking of Modernism' in its overall urban design.[328] Soviet town planning was exported without any meaningful public consultation across the USSR and later to other communist countries. As the following chapter shows, post-war North Korea and Vietnam were also influenced by Soviet-style urban reconstruction.

Ultimately, the global phoenix was an international manifestation of urban resilience. As Vale and Campanella have argued, no matter what might be thrown at them from the air, 'cities are among humankind's most durable artefacts':

> Whether they are reconstructed to accommodate and restore ongoing urban life or rebuilt to serve as sites for periodic visitation and commemoration, it has become exceedingly rare for a major city to be truly or permanently lost.[329]

Lessons from the reconstruction of post-blitzed cities have wider relevance to other major disasters visited upon urban areas, whether by earthquakes, hurricanes or tsunamis. Most of all, they

have thrown up key themes in the reconstruction of cities destroyed in conflicts since the Second World War. Those themes are clear. Destruction creates new opportunities for urban renewal. Planning for the post-war era becomes a policy imperative even while the conflict is raging. Plans are implemented to varying degrees of success due to social, economic, political and practical pressures. Housing is always a priority in reconstruction due to the loss of homes during conflict. Cities and their surviving citizens become experiments for new directions in architecture and urban design, experiments often mediated by a desire to rebuild the pre-war cityscape. This last point reminds us that cities are also sites of a violent disruption to the urban fabric and to people's experience and memories of their city. These themes deserve to be continually emphasised by historians lest their significance become neglected in urban development born of trauma.