
Contemporary Effects of Post-war Urban Reconstruction in the German-Polish Border Region as Lessons for Ukrainian Reconstruction Processes

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Abstract:

Purpose: The purpose of this article is to analyse the concept of post-war reconstruction of cities in the former Pomeranian province and the contemporary implications of the reconstruction processes of the time. The authors also identify lessons from this process that may be applicable to the development of concepts for the post-war reconstruction of Ukrainian cities.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research analysed documentation on the assessment of the scale of destruction of the cities within the framework of the inventories and early reconstruction concepts on the Polish and German sides. The contemporary structure of selected cities and the resulting repercussions of the implementation of reconstruction concepts were analysed.

Findings: The post-war reconstruction of the cities of Pomerania was specific due to socio-political changes. It was characterised by an ideological approach, a desire to manifest the new reality of the communist state but also to modernise space according to modernist urban concepts. Today, these cities have a number of problems resulting from the need to change these concepts and the destruction of the identity of the place.

Practical Implications: The implementation of urban concepts is very sustainable. Modernist concepts for the structure of small towns today require numerous interventions in the urban fabric. When planning a reconstruction today, special attention should be paid not only to the feasibility of contemporary ideas, but also to the preservation of the identity of the place, often linked to a difficult past, which should be tamed and not erased.

Originality/Value: The post-war reconstruction of Pomerania took place in different realities compared to contemporary Ukraine, but the long-term effects of the reconstruction concepts described, show the importance of local conditions, historical background and the need for careful preparation of the concepts implemented.

Keywords: Post-war reconstruction, small cities development, Pomerania.

JEL codes: O2, N4, I3.

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

The turbulent history of the 20th century was marked by unparalleled destruction in the development of societies and geographical space. European societies have therefore had many difficult experiences of planning for reconstruction and of perceiving the effectiveness of its objectives.

These experiences take on particular importance today, when in Ukraine we are dealing with the first full-scale conflict after World War II, resulting in destruction of eastern cities comparable to that of 1914-18 and 1939-45. A characteristic feature of the conflict landscapes that remain after modern warfare is the accumulation of impacts in the urbanised areas where fighting is concentrated and their rapid disappearance during the reconstruction period (Renes, 2022).

Destruction is mainly caused by days of intense artillery shelling, fires and sometimes the intentional destruction of infrastructure after the capture of cities. The result is catastrophic damage to the urban fabric and technical infrastructure. After the end of hostilities, society is thus faced with the challenge of almost completely rebuilding. In many cases, the implementation of such a task provides an opportunity to change or improve the spatial layout, character or structure of buildings. Sometimes such a change is not only urban in nature, but also cultural.

This paper presents an analysis of the historical approach to the reconstruction processes in the contemporary Polish-German border towns in the regions of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Brandenburg and the West Pomeranian Voivodeship. Before the war this area was on German territory, within the Pomeranian Province, and was characterised by a high degree of cultural and urban cohesion. Apart from Szczecin Stargard, Kołobrzeg and Stralsund, these are small towns with a contemporary population of no more than 20,000.

The starting point for the research was an analysis of the scale and nature of the destruction of the cities after 1945 as reported in the various types of documentation preserved in the archives and analysed in the literature. Post-war conditions meant that the reconstruction process on both sides of the border varied, the effects of which in the spatial layout and character of the towns are still visible today.

The contemporary effects of the implementation of reconstruction are a valuable contribution to the discussion on the assumptions of the reconstruction of Ukraine, making clear the persistence of the assumptions once made in the structure and functioning of the reconstructed cities.

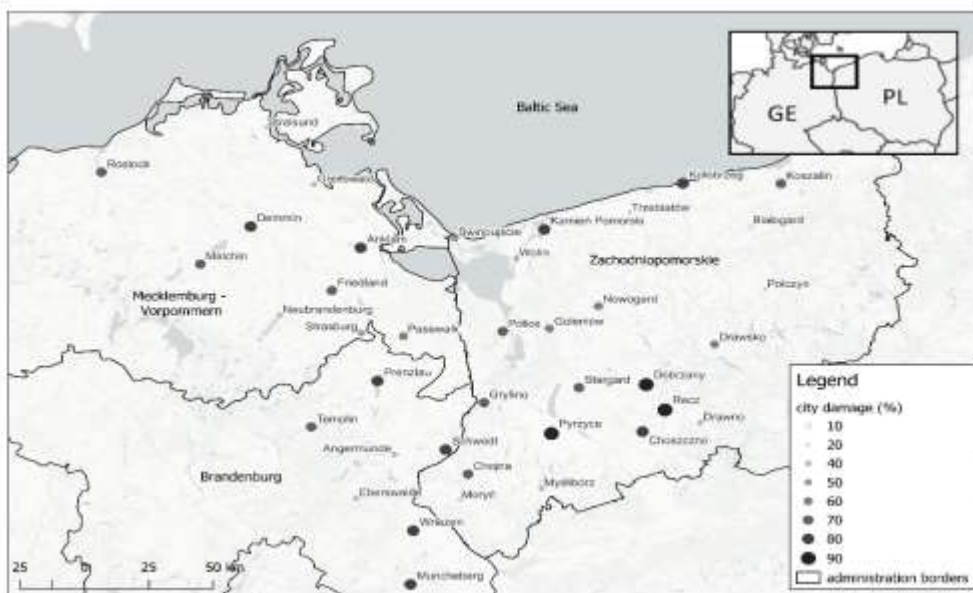
2. Results and Discussion

At the end of the Second World War, most towns in the province of Pomerania, which was divided by the Allies between Poland and the later German Democratic Republic, were severely damaged (Figure 1). The destruction in the larger cities (Szczecin, Świnoujście) was caused by Allied bombing raids, while dozens of smaller towns were destroyed by land warfare in the spring of 1945. It is estimated that in the German part (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Brandenburg) about 9.4% of the 1939 housing stock was completely destroyed (Bode, 2002).

In the Polish part (former Szczecin Voivodeship) 35.9 thousand destroyed properties were inventoried in 1945 and in Szczecin alone there were 8.6 thousand (Aniszewska, 2021). Most cities were destroyed during frontal operations and here the scale of destruction depended on the duration and intensity of the fighting.

Some, however, were destroyed already after the front had passed as a result of an intentional process of destruction. Some urban organisms were destroyed practically in their entirety (e.g., Pyrzyce, Choszczno as a result of heavy sieges and Prenzlau and Chojna as a result of arson). Inventories indicate that in many towns the greatest damage was concentrated in the old town area - around market squares, where it often reached 97% (Dobrzany, Chociwel, Stargard). This was not the result of warfare but rather a spontaneous action of "destroying the heart of the town" by conquerors and marauders.

Figure 1. Percentage of destroyed buildings in Pomeranian cities according to post-war inventarisations (own elaboration based on primal archival sources and Aniszewska, 2015; Bode, 1995)



Immediately after the war, the destroyed town centres began to be deconstructed and plans were made for a rapid reconstruction that would meet the dramatic shortage of housing for the incoming population (in the Polish part of Pomerania there was a complete replacement of the population). Reconstruction required rapid action, hence preserving 'heritage values' was not a top priority (Larkham and Adams, 2022). A number of strategies were adopted on how to rebuild and how to approach the urban and historic heritage of urban settings:

1. Preservation, or documentation of damage. Preservation of the "park of ruins" and construction of a new town outside the old town (in the plans such a situation was to take place in Lübeck and Gdansk and in fact, although it is difficult to say whether it was intentionally applied in Kostrzyn).
2. Restoration of original condition. Applied to the iconic, most valuable assumptions. E.g. in Lübeck, Wismar or Gdansk.
3. Complete renunciation of the restoration of the destroyed urban fabric. Rejection of old concepts of historicism in reaction to the hubris of nationalism and post-war poverty, in Poland a rejection of Germanness.
4. Using wartime destruction to modernise the spatial layout of cities (Hackmann, 2021).

The actual, implemented reconstruction plans most often used strategies 3 and 4. These included variants:

- reconstruction of the entire old town premises,
- the reconstruction of only a few key historic buildings while retaining the original spatial layout (street grid) infilled with low-density contemporary housing,
- a complete spatial and functional redevelopment of the inner city in line with the idea of a "socialist city" (Bode, 1995; 2002).

In the DDR, the model of the so-called 'socialist city' was specified in 1950 (Taubenböck *et al.*, 2021). At that time, the "Principles of Urban Development" (Grundsätze des Städtebaus) were approved, outlining the ideological direction according to which urban development and reconstruction should take place (Ministerialblatt der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1950).

They emphasised the importance of socialist architectural forms, national and class content, the significance of squares and central buildings in the life of society. Similar principles were favoured in Polish urban planning. The reconstruction of cities was therefore guided by ideological objectives. Models were drawn from those developed in the Soviet Union. In many cases, the traditional and historic city plan was consciously abandoned and even buildings that did not fit the socialist concept of reconstruction were deliberately demolished.

In the mid-1950s, a decision emerged in both countries to industrialise and standardise industrial prefabrication and site assembly construction in order to build faster and more efficiently (Wagner and Grünthaler, 2017). In many cities of the analysed region, so-called 'inner-city residential districts' consisting of standardised prefabricated blocks placed in the former street grid are being created within the medieval layout.

This has resulted in a complete change in the physiognomy and function of the centre, the structure of services and social interaction. The process of rebuilding the central zones of the city was interrupted, reaching the stage of housing estates with a low standard of services and accompanying facilities (Tuszyński, 2008).

It is assumed that the first phase of reconstruction was completed by the 1960s. The priority of this phase was the provision of housing (Sekuła, 1965). Delays were caused by the slow influx of settlers (towns in the lake district belt), the blocking of settlement by the presence of the Russian army (Szczecin, Świnoujście), the blocking of settlement of the border strip between the countries and often a lack of decisions on how to rebuild. Also specific to Poland were the mass demolitions of ruins and sometimes surviving buildings immediately after the war in order to recover the bricks needed to rebuild, among other things, the capital (Altrock *et al.*, 2010; Migdalski, 2021).

Many towns were deserted for a long time after the war, and the damage was not so much the result of war damage as the fact that they had been abandoned for many years. This was the case in Cedynia, Widuchowa and Nowe Warpno. In the 1970s and 1980s the rebuilding process continued, concentrating at this stage on rebuilding significant buildings of key importance to the town's history, most often town halls, churches or the seats of rulers.

Decisions on the way in which post-war reconstruction was carried out still affect the functioning of the region's cities today, proving that urban planning decisions and land development are often "forever" on the scale of people's lives. The dematerialisation of inner-city developments has meant that the centres of life have moved outside the old town. Even the subsequent reconstruction, the "improvement" and densification of modernist blocks and the re-location of service facilities has not always led to the restoration of the inner city function. In the meantime, new service and shopping centres were developed outside the old town centres.

This was the case in Stargard, Chojna, Pyrzyce or Kamień, among others. This process is continuing and intensifying today. A characteristic image of a Pomeranian town on both sides of the border is a "shell", a pseudo - old town filled with socialist blocks and squares, with preserved street layout, often surrounded by a picturesque ring of ramparts and a green belt adjacent to medieval fortifications. Interesting examples are Neubrandenburg, Schwedt, Police and Gryfino, where the location of large-scale residential districts outside the old town and the construction of large

industrial plants causing an influx of people, resulted in the creation of two competing town centres.

The division between the 'old' city and the 'new' city, which could easily exist separately, is perpetuated not only in the architecture, but also in the social interaction and structure (Bręcz-Kupiec, 2016). Decisions made almost 80 years ago have contributed to the fact that Pomeranian cities, especially in the Polish part, are suffering from an identity crisis.

Residents reach nostalgically for period photographs and plans, discovering with amazement the destroyed richness of former urban forms. In cities of major tourist importance, this has led to a number of reconstruction projects restoring parts of the city to their former appearance (e.g. the so-called "new old town" in Kołobrzeg and Szczecin).

3. Conclusions: Contemporary Analogies

Due to the ongoing war in Ukraine, the problem of the future reconstruction of this country from the destruction becomes topical. The search for historical parallels, knowledge of which would enable the use of positive models as well as the avoidance of past mistakes, deserves attention. Such an analysis in relation to the reconstruction of German cities after WWII was carried out in (Müller, Khrystoforova and Lyashenko 2022).

It emphasises the need for financial support from Ukraine and the building of an international coalition to help finance the initial phase of reconstruction of cities, urban facilities and industrial infrastructure. An analogy with the post-war situation of the former GDR and the need to quickly solve the housing shortage is also recognised by (Hierlihy, Profile and Sadowski, 2022.), pointing to the danger of an exodus of workers with high human capital from Ukraine, as was the case in the GDR, where a large migration of workers to West Germany was recorded before the construction of the Berlin Wall.

This problem, according to the authors, may be more easily solved with modern prefabricated house technology (another parallel with the 1950s), which can later be privatised. Modern housing can contribute to the return of a larger group of Ukrainian citizens from emigration, a key task given the country's significant, even catastrophic depopulation (Rogoża, 2023).

Historical analogies with regard to the pace and direction of reconstruction of Eastern and Western European cities (Marshall Plan) point strongly to the need for external assistance to Ukraine, which may involve the creation of a specialised agency with wide-ranging competences, correcting the administration of aid funds (Kopinski *et al.*, 2022).

The discussion on the reconstruction of Ukraine includes both the issues of derusification and decommunization of urban space, as well as the aspect of preserving cultural heritage (Dyak, 2023). After the Second World War, as in the former DDR and the People's Republic of Poland (countries that came under the control of the USSR), the destroyed cities of Ukraine were rebuilt according to the concepts of planners and architects, working closely with the political authorities.

Under the influence of politics, the historic cities of present-day Ukraine underwent significant urbanisation transformations. In particular, the built-up areas of the inner cities were changed, where new "aggressive" modernist structures were created. These activities intensified especially after 1955, following the resolutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR "On the elimination of redundant elements in design and construction" (Rybchynskyi, 2016).

In the perspective of Ukraine's future membership of the European Union (EU), there is a need for new models of reconstruction, different from the outdated post-Soviet patterns implemented after WWII. A new trend in relation to the models created after WWII is the postulated necessity to include environmental issues in reconstruction plans. It concerns the reduction of emissions of compounds affecting climate change, the improvement of the energy performance of newly constructed buildings and the use of financial incentives to reduce the carbon footprint of private buildings (Glaeser and Golin, 2022; Bocian *et al.*, 2022).

Adequate waste management policies and efficient treatment and disposal of wastewater should also be an important element of future reconstruction. The Ukrainian government and its international partners recognise the need to synchronise these activities to be in line with the objectives of the European Green Deal (EGD) (Holovko and Haug, 2023).

In mobilising aid resources in this regard, it will be necessary to develop lists of green investment projects that could be financed by national and international banks and international public funds (Saha *et al.*, 2022). The scale of the use of spatial data and IT-supported urban planning will certainly also be important considerations in the reconstruction of damaged cities in the age of the geospatial revolution.

The specificity of the problems of rebuilding Ukrainian cities is very clear. The destruction resulting from the protracted conquest of even the smallest settlements is almost total and concentrated in the regions of the country affected by heavy fighting (Zaporozhye, Kherson, the Donetsk area).

Most of the cities in this region were heavily destroyed during the Second World War and were rebuilt according to the same principles of ideologised urban planning as the cities of the German-Polish border region presented in this publication. Towns with a historical spatial layout are rather characteristic of Western Ukraine and the former Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia and are located far from the

battlefields. Reconstruction will therefore again involve (as in the Pomeranian case) a decision to improve the spatial layout, break with tradition (this time Soviet) and redefine in the shape of the cities the emerging new identity of this country. It is to be hoped that, in this case, planners and decision-makers will rely more on the expectations and needs of the local community.

The experience of reconstruction after the Second World War is a valuable lesson in the present day. The perspective of 80 years of use of the reconstructed urban space warrants certain conclusions:

- The Pomeranian experience shows the value of preserving the town centre, usually in the form of the old town. It is to remain an administrative and service centre, a tourist attraction and a carrier of the history and character of the place. Convenient solutions in the form of relocating new buildings have not worked.
- Outstanding architectural buildings are the bearers of a place's identity. Residents will sooner or later try to bring them back to life.
- The ideologisation of urban design loses its significance over time, although it significantly affects the quality, functionality and aesthetics of the assumptions.
- Semi-urban trends (new urbanism, the benevolent city, smart cities, greening or social participation) seem to be more oriented towards meeting the needs of the inhabitants than the "cold" concepts of modernism or the assumptions of socialist cities.

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