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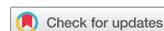
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Replanning and rebuilding cities damaged by catastrophe: the *Planning Perspectives* contribution

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ABSTRACT

Planning Perspectives has published a substantial body of papers on a wide range of aspects of post-catastrophe replanning and rebuilding, with a particular focus on the catastrophe of the Second World War. This brief overview identifies these papers, assesses their contribution to this still-developing field, and suggests an agenda for future research.

KEYWORDS

Post-war reconstruction; replanning; *Planning Perspectives*

Introduction

All cities change over time: usually this is a relatively slow process, but sometimes change comes very quickly, spurred by some form of catastrophe. The catastrophe may be natural (earthquake, flood) or human-caused (fire, war, or perhaps even economic crisis). The planning responses following catastrophe have formed an important part of planning history, as they encapsulate the then-current responses and priorities of urban planning, design, and function in a way normally only otherwise seen in periods of new town foundation. Some of these plans become iconic, influencing academic, professional, and even public views decades, perhaps centuries, after they were produced, whether or not they were implemented.¹ Examining the long drawn-out implementation of such plans identifies the changing values and attitudes, and professional practices, over an extended post-catastrophe period. At a time of current catastrophe, the urban fighting and destruction in Ukraine that have been part of daily news for most of 2022, it is timely to reconsider how the planning history of another major conflict, the Second World War and its aftermath, has been studied, and whether it could provide lessons - or at least issues to consider - for the eventual aftermath of the current conflict.

Spurred by academic networking in the late 1980s and, particularly, the resulting book edited by Jeff Diefendorf and published in 1990,² interest has continued to grow in the following third of a century. For the UK, basic bibliographic work has uncovered the surprising extent and variety of this replanning and reconstruction activity,³ although this remains to be done systematically elsewhere. Many more individual case studies have been explored, many new themes have emerged, and many new writers have brought new perspectives. Most interestingly, the processes and products of the intensive but short-lived period of replanning, and the built forms they engendered, are

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¹Hebbert, "The Long After-Life of Christopher Wren's Short-Lived London".

²Diefendorf, *Rebuilding Europe's Bombed Cities*.

³Larkham and Lilley, *Planning the 'City of Tomorrow'*. <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fbcuassets.blob.core.windows.net%2Fdocs%2Freconstruction-bibliography-2022-132865384612844440.doc&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>.

being re-evaluated in the context of the full duration of the post-war period, as Cullingworth and colleagues did for the UK's new reconstruction-era legislation, the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, 50 years on.⁴ This is a rich, but still fast-developing, field. It is also a multi-disciplinary field and seems to be becoming even more so. Histories of planning and places are being informed by a 'cultural turn' which explores the individuals and personalities of plan-makers, including the diverse factors influencing their approaches; more consideration of agents and agency in post-disaster decision-making processes; visual representation and imagery; and the cultural impact of destruction, reconstruction and remembrance. The post-Second World War reconstruction has been compared with other catastrophes,⁵ and its impact in generating new ideas and practices in planning – for example in urban conservation – has been explored,⁶ including the re-use or re-creation of history in the reconstruction product.⁷ More sophisticated oral histories have given us recollections of those who lived through bombing and the ensuing rebuilding, although the number of survivors is inevitably diminishing fast.⁸ Political and economic histories explore the factors underlying the action, and often inaction, of rebuilding.⁹ These are the realities that shape rebuilding, often far more directly than the ideals of most reconstruction plans. Comparative studies are a useful means of increasing understanding beyond that provided by individual case studies, and both national and international comparisons are appearing (at decade-long intervals, on Germany, Japan, and Europe).¹⁰ There have been re-evaluations of key planning documents such as the Bournville Village Trust's housing and social survey work in *When we build again* (reprinted 2013);¹¹ interdisciplinary explorations of the immediate and long-term impact of the blitz and of the cultural and professional context of reconstruction planning.

Not only are the academic approaches becoming more sophisticated and nuanced, but the public engagement with the effects of wartime destruction and rebuilding is, perhaps surprisingly, growing. The popularity of 'blockbuster' histories and diaries in high-street bookshops is plain to see (for example Kynaston's series on post-war Britain¹²), and commemorations in terms of new memorials and public artworks still appear, spurred perhaps by anniversaries of key events. Even guided walks of bombsites and rebuilt buildings are still popular in those badly-bombed cities, while others still show surface car-parks and neglected sites that were once bomb sites, or more minor mementoes such as shrapnel damage, commemorative plaques, and so on. In Hull, the ruin of the National Picture Theatre, bombed in March 1941 and never redeveloped, has State protection *because* it is one of the last remaining bombsites, and is now likely to form a museum and memorial to the civilian blitz casualties.¹³ In some countries, notably Poland and Germany, the changing culture of remembrance has led to the re-creation (actual or debated) of bombed buildings, sometimes rather belatedly, and usually giving rise to considerable public and professional debate.¹⁴ Further, given the ever-lengthening perspective of hindsight and experience, we are now re-evaluating those buildings and urban areas that were rebuilt – at least those that have survived. Some are now six or seven

⁴Cullingworth, *British Planning*.

⁵Diefendorf, "Reconstructing Devastated Cities".

⁶Pendlebury, "Planning the Historic City"; Larkham, "Developing Concepts of Conservation".

⁷Hagen, "Rebuilding the Middle Ages after the Second World War"; Webb, "Local Responses to the Protection of Medieval Buildings and Archaeology".

⁸Adams and Larkham, *The Everyday Experiences of Reconstruction and Regeneration*.

⁹Flinn, *Rebuilding Britain's Blitzed Cities*.

¹⁰Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War*; Hein, Diefendorf, and Ishida, *Rebuilding Urban Japan*; Düwel and Gutschow, *A Blessing in Disguise*.

¹¹Bournville Village Trust, *When we Build Again*.

¹²Kynaston, *Austerity Britain* and successor volumes.

¹³Young, "Bombed Hull Cinema".

¹⁴Bold, Larkham, and Pickard, *Authentic Reconstruction*.

decades old and, in the normal course of urban change, would be subject to alteration, demolition, and redevelopment. Some have been protected through official conservation designations, or are in course of such reappraisal, though this is often contentious.¹⁵ Others have generated such virulent negative reactions that they have already been redeveloped, after lifespans that seem very short for such large investments – particularly true for larger structures and those of less-popular materials and styles, especially concrete Brutalism.¹⁶ So our reviews of the processes of experiencing and rebuilding now have to encompass the product and its survival in today's very different cultural and economic climate. A deep historical awareness can usefully inform such re-evaluations and assessments of 'significance' (in heritage and preservation terms).

Over this three-decade period – virtually the whole life of the journal – *Planning Perspectives* has published studies covering a range of European countries (Austria, France, Italy, and the UK), although the coverage of the Near, Middle, and Far East has been patchy. This sustained output complements the more episodic consideration in journal thematic issues, although *Storia Urbana* has produced theme issues on Italian (2007), German (2010), Japanese (2013), French (2017), and British reconstruction (2018).

Papers in *Planning Perspectives* have explored the roles of specific individuals involved in compiling plans, and the issues and circumstances that shaped their involvement;¹⁷ but these can be contrasted with the influence of government (for example, in London, pushing the appointment of consultants¹⁸) and the critical views of individual civil servants on British plans and planners.¹⁹ The latter provided an eye-opening discussion of the very critical views held by Ministry civil servants of any plan not originating in the Ministry, and of the work of even the most experienced and well-known plan authors: it is perhaps surprising that these comments remain in the UK National Archives. The journal's coverage has tended to reinforce the perspective of 'great plans of great white male planners' (for example Thomas Sharp in the UK,²⁰ Gaston Bardet in France²¹ and Giovanni Astegno and Giorgio Rigotti in Italy²²) at the expense of municipal, often anonymous, authors of the majority (in the UK at least) of plans. A key aspect revealed by many such studies is the nature and extent of personal and institutional conflicts in these planning processes.²³ Aspects of the trans-national transfer of planning ideas have been examined (for example between Soviet Russia and the UK²⁴). Independent and formally-commissioned plans are covered: although the latter predominate, Marmaras and Sutcliffe's examination of the three independent plans for post-war London form a useful reminder of the wide range of unofficial planning.²⁵ The genesis and fate of specific plans are reviewed (for example Hull, a plan which has virtually vanished despite the eminence of its authors, Edwin Lutyens and Patrick Abercrombie²⁶) and the scale of activity covered ranges from national capitals (for example Vienna²⁷) to the smallest local towns.²⁸ Papers also examine specific themes including housing, a clear priority for the many whose homes were

¹⁵Larkham, "Bombing and Rebuilding"; While and Tait, "Exeter and the Question of Thomas Sharp's Physical Legacy".

¹⁶Hopkins, *Lost Futures*.

¹⁷For example Essex and Brayshay, "Vision, Vested Interest and Pragmatism".

¹⁸Hasegawa, "Governments, Consultants and Expert Bodies".

¹⁹Larkham, "Hostages to History?"; Hasegawa, "The Attitudes of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning".

²⁰*Planning Perspectives* theme issue, vol. 24(1).

²¹Bullock, "Gaston Bardet".

²²Scrivano, "The Elusive Polemics of Theory and Practice".

²³For example in Sheffield: Lewis, "Planning Through Conflict".

²⁴Ward, "Soviet Communism".

²⁵Marmaras and Sutcliffe, "Planning for Post-War London".

²⁶Jones, " ... A Fairer and Nobler City".

²⁷Diefendorf, "Planning Postwar Vienna".

²⁸Larkham and Pendlebury, "Reconstruction Planning and the Small Town".

damaged and destroyed;²⁹ industry;³⁰ and the impact of reconstruction on local communities.³¹ Hence this is a good snapshot of research during the past three decades. *Planning Perspectives* has not only contributed to, but helped to shape, this international debate, as can be seen by the citations of this body of work in larger-scale publications.³²

An agenda for continuing inquiry is emerging: issues that have so far received much less attention include the regional-scale plans of the period; the impact of infrastructure and new technology on the reconstructed cities; and the contemporary re-evaluation of the products of the reconstruction era; and elements of plan production that encompass wider perspectives including female, community and non-official. The spatial distribution of attention has been unequal, and there is much scope for more eastern, rather than western, research. Related to this, the sharing of reconstruction experiences and ideas evidently affected the transnationalism of post-war planning, but this could be explored more explicitly. Although some exist, more explicit comparisons, especially internationally, would also be welcome.³³ Finally, more systematic exploration of a common justification for the historical study is appropriate: what can be learned from the experience of replanning and rebuilding in the aftermath of one major catastrophe, the Second World War, that could provide ideas for the response to today's crisis in Ukraine, or indeed future crises? Such an agenda fits well into Wakeman's wider rethinking of postwar planning history.³⁴

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributor

Peter J. Larkham is Professor of Planning at Birmingham City University and has published extensively on post-Second World War reconstruction. His most recent book is, with David Adams, *The Everyday Experiences of Reconstruction and Regeneration* (Routledge, 2019). He is also Editor of the journal *Urban Morphology*.

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²⁹Bullock, "Developing Prototypes"; Malpass, "Wartime Planning for Post-War Housing"; Tsubaki, "Model for a Short-Lived Future?".

³⁰Garside, "The Significance of Post-War London Reconstruction Plans".

³¹Adams, "Everyday Experiences"; Hubbard, Faire, and Lilley, "Contesting the Modern City".

³²Greenhalgh, *Reconstructing Modernity*; Flinn, *Rebuilding Britain's Blitzed Cities*.

³³Diefendorf, "Rebuilding the Cities Destroyed in the Second World War".

³⁴Wakeman, "Rethinking Postwar Planning History".

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