2.4

HISTORY AND HERITAGE

The Reconstruction of Blitzed Cities

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This chapter considers the long story of reconstruction following the destruction of the Second World War, from replanning through to rebuilding, the subsequent use and adaptation of what was built, and whether today, seven decades later, it should be considered as heritage. This relatively short period, between about 1940 and the middle 1970s, is one of great significance for European urbanism (Mamoli and Trebbi 1988: Part 1).

The context is the scale and severity of the wartime destruction (Figure 2.4.1), ranging from minor blast damage to the flattening of large expanses of cities. In studying, or even calculating the extent of, this damage, the wartime and post-war historical record is patchy. Different definitions of categories of damage, and levels of precision in recording it, cause problems for comparison; but in Warsaw, 90% of industry and 72% of housing were destroyed (Ciborowski 1970) and in Berlin, 16 km² of the city was rubble, and for every inhabitant there was nearly 30 m³ of rubble (Rürup 1995: 13; Fest 2004: 8). But people, as well as places, suffered. Even in Helsinki, a relatively little-damaged city, residents "whose love for their homes built of brick and mortar can never be fully understood by anybody from the countryside, felt deep agony when they saw the smoking ruins …" (Talvio 1950).

This raises the issue of the differing experiences of city and countryside; and yet much of the literature focuses on the urban experience. The effects of war are much broader and, in this conflict, reconstruction was also affected by geopolitical issues, the reshaping of national identities and population movement, as Clout (2011) shows for Alsace.

Damage was often made worse by the demolition of buildings that might, in other circumstances, have been repairable. This happened both as an immediate emergency measure and, sometimes, years after the end of the war. This was true in many countries (Lambourne 2001: 171–179) but particularly in France despite local advocacy for preservation, as for example in Saint-Malo (Blanchot 1994): there is a suggestion that there was an "overwhelming drive to forget the trauma of war by erasing its ruins" (Crane 2004: 303).

Recovery from damage of this scale is a complex and lengthy process. The burgeoning literature on post-disaster reconstruction suggests several stages including

1. Understanding the implications of the nature, scale and speed of disaster
2. Emergency responses
3. Re-planning

Quelle: Deutsche Fotothek

FIGURE 2.4.1 Ruins of Dresden, 1950.

Source: Photograph by R & R Rössing, Bundesarchiv, Deutsche Fotothek CC-BY-SA-3.0-DE.

4. Rebuilding
5. Reappraising and re-rebuilding (Larkham 2018: 431)

This chapter focuses on stages 3–5. During and immediately after the conflict, stage 1 was often over-hasty or virtually absent; and stage 2 equally hasty, sometimes causing additional damage, creating personal or political problems (Berg 2006) or physical structures such as the German rubble mountains (*Trummerbergen*: de Maio 2013), a rubble beach near Liverpool (Schultz 2019) or the use of blitz rubble for infill and reclamation (e.g., New York, with British rubble: Jackson 1995: 393). The existence of pre-war plans was also often a consideration: for example Birmingham's City Engineer asserted that the city's redevelopment ideas predated the bombing (e.g., Manzoni 1955: 90); and Coventry and Rotterdam had exhibitions of radical Modernist urbanism immediately before their major air raids.

However, the majority of towns and cities – damaged or not – produced plans in the first post-war decades. There are other reasons for this level of activity, including the need for towns to reposition themselves in the changing post-war urban system and economy, and civic boosterism (Larkham and Lilley 2003). Yet the financial implications of this activity were substantial, especially for smaller towns. Planning was not a cheap activity, even when the plans were not implemented. Whether damaged or not, plan-making was influenced by the same professional, social and economic context.

Sources are still plentiful. Published plans demonstrate the range of contemporary planning ideas and archival sources, although incomplete and dispersed, give evidence of processes of plan production and consumption. Interviews of plan authors have been useful (Voldman 1990) although subject to problems of fading memory and potential bias; while interviews of those who lived through the reconstruction process have also been revealing (Adams and Larkham 2013) but, now, survivors are scarce. Finally, the urban landscape itself still reveals substantial evidence of damage and rebuilding although, 70 years later, reconstruction-era buildings are themselves being redeveloped (Larkham and Adams 2019).

Replanning

This stage focuses on identifying how plans were produced and communicated. Most of this activity was planning afresh after the catastrophe (hence *re*planning) although, in some instances, the post-war planning was simply a continuation of pre-war efforts. In most cases, though, the replanning was – initially at least – radical, innovative and implying new physical structures and even ways of life. Within any one national planning system there could be a wide range of approaches and plans varied in their scale, nature, level of detail and the timescale suggested for their implementation. But many plans remained unimplemented, overtaken by events: was this stage largely a waste of effort and scarce resources?

The common view of these reconstruction plans is that they represented a consensus. For London at least, "historians are generally agreed that the metropolitan plans of the 1940s worked to produce a consensus about appropriate models for the future development of London" (Mort 2004: 150). Mort goes on to argue that conventional histories underplay the complexity of that consensus, and that conventional readings of planning as policy and implementation are inadequate. Yet it is clear that the majority of these plans were products of a top-down process, imposed on local populations by well-meaning municipalities, and sometimes even imposed on municipalities by governments. They were not necessarily a consensus arising from what would today be recognized as public consultation, although many plans were widely published and exhibited, and comments on even radical Modernist proposals were often initially positive

(e.g., of Coventry's 1940 exhibition: the visitor comments survive in the Johnston-Marshall collection, Edinburgh University, ABT SR 6). The contemporary view "seems to have been that of the planner as omniscient ruler, who should create new settlement form, and perhaps also destroy the old without interference or question" (Hall 1992: 61).

It should be noted that some alternative visions conflicted with the standard, top-down, sometimes authoritarian plan-making mechanisms. This can be seen in both Coventry and Rotterdam between 1940 and 1955 (Couperus 2015). Some informal proposals were produced by local groups or even through media competitions, as in Liverpool (Spencer 1944); although the 'non-state' planning activities were eventually overridden, replanning could nevertheless be a contested process.

Some of the plans were very simplistic, others over-complex. Some sought to replace what had been lost but most proposed improvements, especially to infrastructure and civic administration buildings, to replace war-damaged and slum housing, and to provide new business, retail and industrial quarters. Ring roads and civic centers were common components of plans. The most radical plans proposed entirely new settlements, in some cases simply abandoning and relocating away from areas of destruction, as Graubner proposed for Hannover (Gutschow 1990: note 6) and Tourry for Lorient (Richard 1994).

Plans ranged from small-format pamphlets, circulated free or very cheaply, to large-format and expensive books. Many were accompanied by extensive public and professional exhibitions, and again the surviving material demonstrates how planning ideas were communicated – although there is little evidence of genuine public consultation or contribution, or even that public comments led to changes in draft plans.

It is difficult, at this distance in time, to evaluate the reception of these plans. A review of Max Lock's Bedford plan, for example, stated that "The report is beautifully produced … The maps, however, appear to be rather too complicated for lay-people to understand and perhaps a little insufficient for the use of technicians. Simpler and clearer maps are called for in a book of this kind" (Holliday 1953: 248). The wartime Wolverhampton plan generated little public interest if measured by letters in the local newspaper, which gave far more coverage to a parliamentary proposal to make rear lights on bicycles compulsory! (Larkham 2002).

Complexity and Multiple Plans

Many plans were extremely complex, wide-ranging and spanned decades, seeking to solve all possible problems in one document. Hence "Far too many of the small local authorities have been bitten with megalomania" (Ministry memo, mid 1944, TNA HLG 79/124). Many have seen the plans as naïve, unrealistic and Utopian; although Hollow (2012) suggests that planners' Utopian impulses were channeled to produce plans that were both idealistic and pragmatic, heavily aspirational and matter-of-fact. It has been suggested that early British reconstruction plans were radical in their proposals (Hasegawa 1999), and indeed this could be applied across much of Europe. These were, normally, sweeping proposals, "unfettered by the existing road and land use patterns" (Hasegawa 1999: 144) (Figure 2.4.2). This is the epitome of the *tabula rasa* approach. Yet there are four problems with this.

First is that few senior planners agreed with the *tabula rasa*, certainly in Britain where, even at its worst, damage was less than in much of the rest of Europe. The influence of an existing morphological frame and landownership patterns was significant despite new planning legislation to facilitate compulsory purchase and land redistribution. Some early German approaches were anti-urban and did seriously propose razing remains and starting afresh (see the example of Hamburg: Gutschow 1990, and note the papers of the planner Konstanty Gutschow, Staatsarchiv
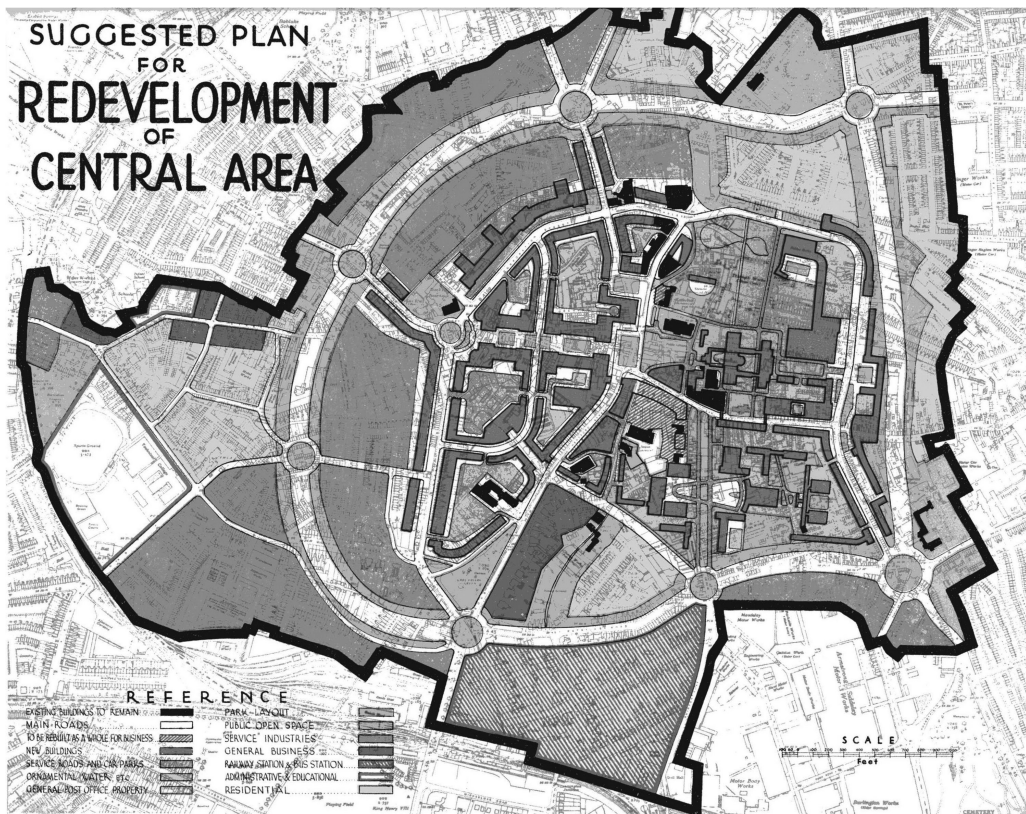
FIGURE 2.4.2 Coventry central area plan, 1945 (author's collection). "A reconstructed town center, encircled by ring roads".

Hamburg). Secondly, many of the plans explicitly considered the conservation of structures or areas, well before this became embedded in some national legislation. Germany was definitely in the forefront of this, with both early legislation and a history of detailed academic study of urban growth and development, such as that by Klemm (1962) of Görlitz, influencing plan production. Thirdly, many alternative plans existed. Different agents produced competing plans, and the extended duration of reconstruction inevitably led to plan modification. Few plans were wholly implemented in their original form. Finally, some plans discussed alternatives; for example the range of layout options produced by Pieper for Lübeck (Figure 2.4.3); and indeed the alternative Lübeck plans by Gruber, Mühlenpfordt and Tamms (Gutschow 2013: 154–161). It is sometimes difficult to see a rationale for a final choice.

Personal Conflicts

Some of these multiple and conflicting plans resulted from personal conflicts. The conflict between the new, young, radical architect Donald Gibson and his communist-inspired team in Coventry, and the established older city engineer, is well known (e.g., Hasegawa 1992: Chapter 4), although sometimes perhaps over-emphasized. Their individual plans were combined following pressure from their employer and the Ministry (but it is Gibson who remains in local memory and with a memorial plaque).
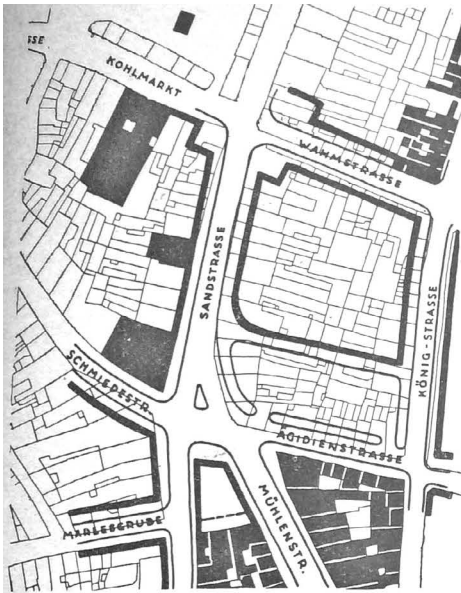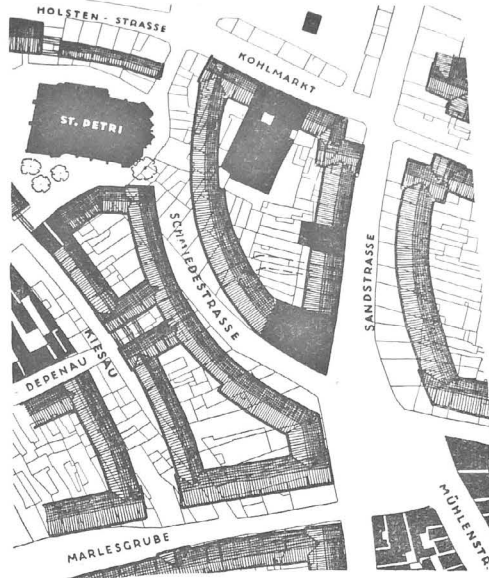
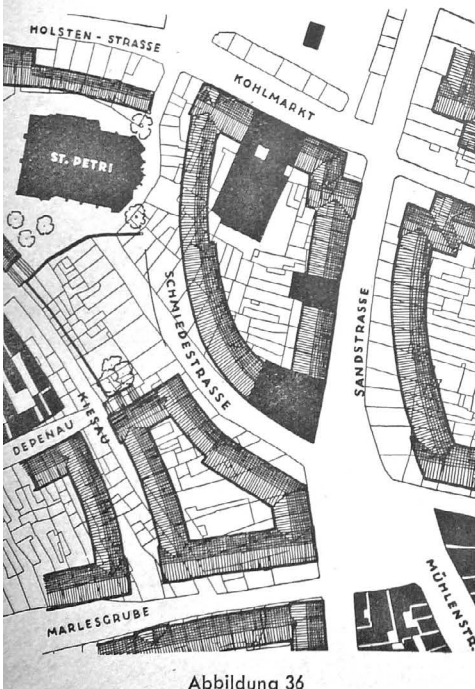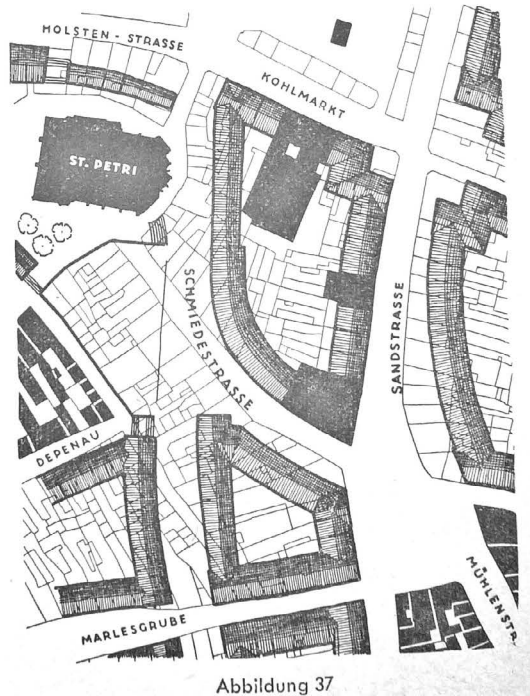**FIGURE 2.4.3**   Alternative plans for part of Lübeck by Hans Pieper (1946).

Britain's new Ministry had problems in that most plans produced outside the Ministry itself were heavily criticized, and that extended to the individual authors themselves. Even Patrick Abercrombie, probably the country's best-known planner, was not immune: of his *Greater London Plan* the Ministry said "The text had to be very considerably re-cast by our officers who could ill be spared, and the maps to make the report intelligible have had to be prepared and

are still not finished. Whatever allowances are made for the Professor, we have, I think, strong grounds for complaint" (Ministry memo, early 1945, TNA HLG 104/3). Although the Ministry was often slow in providing advice, distrust of anything 'not invented here' is plain. As far as can be seen from the surviving UK archive material, these conflicts were purely individual: even if based on assessments of the qualities of an individual or their plan, the views were expressed in surprisingly personal ways.

Other examples of conflicts more clearly had ideological or political origins. An example in Germany was the persistence of some individuals, and certainly some concepts, from the Nazi period into the early replanning period at least, although the victorious Allies paid little attention to the war-time activities of the town planners (Dürth and Gutschow 1988; Diefendorf 1993). In Marseille, reconstruction has been characterized as a battle waged among the head architects, each of whom "was championed or reviled in turn by the then-current municipal administration", but other actors were also significant in the "tumultuous history" of this project (Bonillo 1993; Crane 2004: 302).

Rebuilding

Stage 4 is implementation: the rebuilding itself. Again there was much variation, from modernist/brutalist structures to facsimile replication of what had been destroyed. There were some continent-wide similarities, though: in the widespread development of large-scale infrastructure, especially for high-volume and high-speed vehicle movement, and especially with ring roads; and with high-volume, high-density and hence often high-rise housing developments. But sometimes the rebuilding was slow, with shortages of finance and even of construction materials in the early years. This extended duration of rebuilding, inevitable in severely-damaged locations and when funding and materials were scarce, caused problems. Plans often changed during this time both as circumstances and planning ideas changed and, especially, when an external consultants' plan was implemented by others. In Valletta, for example, the plan by the UK consultants Harrison and Hubbard was sensitive to the local context and there were generally positive outcomes when they carried out their own proposals; although when other designers worked at implementation, their decisions often undermined the original design intentions (Chapman 2005).

This "reconstruction era" came to an abrupt end with the 1973 Middle East conflict and oil crisis. This simply halted many projects; few city reconstructions had been completed by then. Saint-Malo, where the final act of rebuilding was the installation of a new cathedral spire in 1971 (Pottier and Petout 1994), was an exception.

Early rebuilding was often of an 'emergency' character, with temporary structures on available sites. Britain's 'prefab' bungalows are a well-known example; with a very short design life, few have survived in original or reclad form. More extensive destruction in France required a more piecemeal approach including Scandinavian and Swiss chalets, US bungalows and locally-made wooden huts; 900 of the latter were still in use in Lorient in 1968 (Clout 2000: 169–170).

Much of the implemented permanent reconstruction, at both architectural and urban scales, was of Modernist form (Figure 2.4.4). Irrespective of the catastrophe, the dominant ideas in these professions were changing: this was the move from tradition to modernity and it was well represented in the new construction (Baudouï 1993). The extensive involvement of architects in plan-making, as well as building design and design at the scale of city quarters, facilitated engagement with new ideas such as modernism (Gold 2007). Modernist approaches to urban space and the relationships between buildings and spaces can be seen in the example of the rebuilt Le Havre (Nasr 1997: Chapter 7). The need for speed, when circumstances permitted, led to new techniques including system building and, although some systems allowed local

FIGURE 2.4.4   Proposal for traffic roundabout, public and commercial buildings, Birmingham (© Birmingham Museums Trust).

variation, the usual result was monotonous low-, medium- and high-rise estates (Alonso and Palmarola 2020). The face of cities and the ways in which much of the urban population lived was transformed in this period. Offices also used Modernist designs and materials, while retail developments introduced new building types such as pedestrian precincts (Taverne 1990).

In many historic cities, there was substantial debate about history, heritage and rebuilding, especially considering the potential conflict between historicity and modernity, and the uses of heritage in identity and image re-creation. In Nuremberg, for example, construction in the later part of the 'reconstruction era' tended to use historic building forms, particularly with pitched roofs, rather than the large-scale Modernism common elsewhere, which had a significant effect on the character and appearance of the rebuilt city (Soane 1992). In some cases, as in Elblag (Poland) this was done in "a rather frenetic post-modern style" termed 'retroversion' (Johnson 2000). Warsaw's replica *Stare Miasto* reconstruction began immediately following the war's end, driven by political imperatives. But it was not entirely accurate: "in order to accentuate the defensive walls and the city panorama as viewed from the Vistula, the reconstruction of some buildings was deliberately foregone. The urban layout was retained, along with the division of the street frontages into historic building plots; however, the properties within these quarters were not rebuilt, thus creating communal open areas for residents" although it was, controversially, awarded World Heritage status (UNESCO 2020).

Reappraising and Re-Rebuilding

Stage 5, of use and adaptation from 1973 to the present, is even more varied. The reconstruction process and product have been widely evaluated – as While and Tait (2009) have done for the legacy of the UK planner Thomas Sharp – and often found wanting, and some structures have

been targeted for redevelopment within the space of a couple of decades. Both individual build-ings, and even major infrastructure representing multi-million-pound investments, have been subject to rapid obsolescence (Larkham and Adams 2019).

As we move further from the difficulties and pressures of rebuilding, more balanced evalua-tions of the quality of reconstruction architecture and urbanism are being produced (including Blom, Vermaat and de Vries (2016) for the Netherlands and Harwood (2015) for the UK). Some authorities have been considering whether the surviving areas and structures from this period might merit retention and protection, becoming part of an "authorized heritage discourse". The complex and contested urban planning and architectural history of their production is often considered secondary to the reactions of the public, which are often very strongly negative about the large-scale modernist/brutalist designs which characterized the reconstruction period. However, it is significant that 'nostalgia' seems to be of increasing importance as an issue in post-war planning, particularly in Germany (Hagen 2005; Arnold 2011).

Coventry faces challenges as its extensive reconstruction-era buildings age. Part of the retail Precinct has been given national protection as 'listed buildings', despite significant alterations, but much is not. Many of the 1950s–60s buildings seem 'ordinary' now, hence not 'special' and so not listed. Yet they, together with new street and plot patterns, produced a radical new, modernist, urban landscape. Both at the time, and still today, this produced international inter-est; and Historic England, the relevant Government agency, commissioned a detailed study of the reconstruction (Gould and Gould 2016). When a small number of post-war buildings were listed in 2018, the city's Cabinet Member for Jobs and Regeneration reacted furiously in local media, suggesting that this would complicate and delay regeneration plans and that Historic England was "unaccountable and not fit for purpose" (Sandford 2018: 7). Both here and in Plymouth, equally badly bombed and radically replanned, that landscape is worth considering for protection of some form. Plymouth City Council was persuaded in 2019 to designate its rebuilt city center as a conservation area, but only after much local resistance, and its boundary is very tightly drawn (Figure 2.4.5). Dresden, in contrast, took radical steps in the new eco-nomic and cultural situation following reunification, and has not only reconstructed the pile of rubble that marked the site of the Frauenkirche, but a number of other nearby modernist buildings have been rebuilt in historicist form. A US student visitor's comment on this approach is "What strikes me most about this reconstruction is the normality of it all. It burned down, so we rebuilt it. While it is never that simple, the sheer amount of reconstruction sure made it seem that way" (KCO 2014).

A related issue has been the heritage of the bombing itself. Although most bombed buildings were cleared very quickly, some remained – and a few remain even today. Numerous bombed churches have been deliberately retained in urban landscapes ranging from national capitals to small towns; others remain abandoned in depopulated rural landscapes. Some were deliberately kept as war memorials, others as landscaped gardens, while some seem merely to be landscape features, historic centerpieces of new developments (Larkham 2020). Some seem to be attract-ing new uses and users, for example with the community and art-related uses of St Luke's (Liverpool) or the Katharinenkloster (Nürnberg). Others, though, seem scarcely used or visited; and this would include St Thomas (Birmingham) despite its re-invention in the late 1980s as a Peace Garden, or the towers of St Mary Magdalene (Budapest) and St Bartholomew (Norwich). Many of these were disposed of by the Church authorities soon after the war, and are now the responsibility of municipalities. Maintenance of such structures is expensive and funding, of course, is lacking.

Stakeholder research about these contested buildings suggests that individuals can be extraor-dinarily powerful in decision-making processes; and that the actual decisions made, perfectly

FIGURE 2.4.5   The reconstruction landscape of Plymouth, now a conservation area. The civic center (left) was listed against the city council's wishes; the building on the right has already had an unsympathetic rooftop extension.

Source: Photograph by author.

legally, may not seem to be firmly evidence-based. For the debate surrounding replacing Birmingham's 1974 Central Library, the social media comments of some pro-redevelopment individuals appear emotive and less evidence-based, while the responsible Minister's comments to local radio give a feeling that personal taste may have influenced decisions. Protesters, often from far afield, are becoming very 'smart' in mobilizing support via new media (Larkham and Adams 2016). Decision-makers need to learn lessons about how the process of decision-making can be presented in this arena: how the careful, professional evaluation of evidence arrives at a clear decision in a transparent manner.

Seventy years after the catastrophe of wartime destruction, the reconstructed buildings and areas are ageing and facing redevelopment or substantial adaptation. Few are surviving: a seemingly widespread reaction against large structures and, in particular, 'brutalist' building has led to demolition in many cases. These structures, still quite fresh in the minds of many of the public, have found few friends in the discourse of heritage identification and management. Yet that discourse is now widening (Larkham 2019).

Balancing pressures for change and conservation is often difficult, particularly so when the urban landscapes are now familiar and modernist, and the buildings ordinary or brutalist. Yet we need to face up to the challenge of evaluating the new post-war urban landscapes, which have become familiar and ordinary, as they may nevertheless have some wider historic significance.

Conclusions

The chapter concludes with reflections on the process of creating the built environment, shaping history, and how this relatively short period of large-scale redevelopment is likely to be reflected in heritage and future urban history. Although shaped by the catastrophe of war, the reconstruction was also driven in part by civic boosterism and pride, especially with the little- and un-damaged places that nevertheless were replanned and rebuilt.

It is clear that large-scale and rapid action was needed to reconstruct many settlements of all scales and types. In some cases, such as Britain which had industrialized early and quickly, slum clearance was an added imperative. Although there was both widespread acceptance that the wartime destruction provided an opportunity for needed reconstruction, and of the position of experts and professionals such as town planners leading to some form of consensus about planning (Stevenson 1986; Ritschel 1995) there was still some significant resistance. Planning was "a term now on everyone's lips. It is at once popular, and discredited. It covers the most dictatorial regimentation and the most casual generalisations" (Oldacre 1948: 3). Schwartz (1944: 4), for example, complained that 'planning' had become "loaded with such ideological glamour and pseudo-scientific import that it has lost any rational leaning … your planner is often a person of tidy, of excessively tidy, mind", while satirical cartoons commented on the intrusiveness of the 'men from the Ministry'. This non-professional, non-academic literature does contribute a useful picture of the range of views circulating at the time.

The very production of systematic plans to respond to the short-, medium- and long-term needs of reconstruction was seen as a positive and novel feature: "the preparation of development plans marks a signal achievement in the history of town and country planning" although "many of the plans may be found to be too narrowly conceived" (Coates 1952: 2). There was considerable debate on the scale and remit of planning, again both professional and non-professional (for the latter see Phillips 1941). But their main problem was implementation. In a period where finance, structural materials and even labor were in short supply, little from these visionary plans was delivered in original form; early, often radical, plans were scaled back; and later plans were significantly less radical in conception (Hasegawa 1999). These plans have, therefore, been discussed as failures, since their details were so rarely implemented. For example Barker and Hyde (1995: 181) note that "most of these impressive volumes are now only likely to interest somebody curious to study how far achievement fell short of intention. The way well-argued propositions came to nothing makes melancholy reading".

This is too harsh a judgment. If one reads many of these texts closely, they are littered with caveats: these were proposals for between 20 and 50 years to come. In other generations and contexts it is also true that there have been more 'paper cities' and 'paper buildings' than have been built, so these plans were not unusually wasteful of resources or unusually over-promising. Their influence has persisted. The plans themselves should be seen as textbook examples of the contemporary approaches to urban form. The documentation underpinning these plans, retained in many local, regional and national archives, tells powerful stories of crisis response, of the reshaping of our built environments, and indeed of the problems and successes of the mechanisms and individuals involved in such processes.

The built environments, from individual buildings and urban quarters to new settlements, that emerged from these processes are also important pieces of evidence. The new is often threatening; the familiar may bring contentment, but age invariably brings reappraisal. The reappraisals of post-war developments have been associated more with demolition and replacement than with recognizing heritage value and preservation. While it is true that only a small proportion of any period's construction has survived and been deliberately retained or preserved,

the post-war period seems particularly unlucky. In public-sector housing alone, for example, the UK's Twentieth Century Society (2020) "has felt very strongly for a number of years that a much larger collection of local authority housing schemes deserve recognition through listing, particularly as many have been published, studied and celebrated across the world". The listing and conservation area designations in central Coventry and Plymouth have been laborious processes in the face of local opposition. But understanding, and even experiencing, these structures is an essential part of understanding a complex and contested part of twentieth-century urbanism. They are, as Clout (1999: 183) terms them, "powerful *lieux de mémoire* in the history of World War II and in the recovery and modernization of Europe". The reconstruction was, in many cases, a significant element in reconstructing communities and identities, as Qualls (2003) shows for Sevastopol; an important point in the fast-changing political and social geography of post-war Europe.

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