

Miastoprojekt Goes Abroad: The Transfer Of Architectural Labour From Socialist Poland To Iraq (1958–1989)

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ABSTRACT

Post-war reconstruction was a foundational experience for Eastern European architectural culture during socialism. The unprecedented task of rebuilding and the construction of new cities, towns and villages in the Soviet Union, Poland, Yugoslavia, and elsewhere brought about a radical rethinking of planning and architectural doctrines. New organizational forms of the profession were introduced; its links with research and industry were forged; and a socialist state apparatus was mobilized in order to integrate planning at all scales, from architectural to regional. Older debates and concerns, from the search for national styles since the late 19th century to the modernist reformism of the pre-war period, were reactivated in ways, at times forcible, that tuned into the socialist discourse. At the same time, post-war reconstruction gave Eastern European architecture and planning an unprecedented global visibility, whether as part of socialist propaganda within Khrushchev's opening to the "Third World," or through information efforts of international organizations, such as the UN.

It was on UN's behalf that Warsaw's chief architect, Adolf Ciborowski, travelled to Baghdad in 1962. He admired the ambition of the regime of Qasim (in power since 1958) to develop Baghdad as a more modern and more just city, but Ciborowski argued that this effort needed to be given a new framework of a revised master plan. His presentation of the post-war reconstruction of Warsaw and other Polish cities led to the invitation issued by the

Amanat Al Assima, the Municipality of Baghdad, to Polish urban planners to participate in the tender competition of the new master plan of Baghdad. Their winning entry resulted in two master plans (1967, 1973) that guided the development of the city until the first Gulf war (1990) and beyond.

This presentation will show the ways in which these master plans learned from and adapted the experience of Eastern Europe's post-war reconstruction to the conditions of Iraq under Qasim and the Ba'ath Party. These lessons included specific planning tools, such as urban norms aimed at an equal distribution of welfare (housing, education, health, culture), and a new approach to Baghdad's historical heritage, in contrast to the previous, British-designed master plan (1956). But equally crucial were new ways of working on the ground. They included the mobilization of an interdisciplinary team of planners and scholars, the preparation of variants of plans and alternative development scenarios, and a comparative perspective that focused not only on Eastern European precedents but also on those in the neighboring countries, including Syria and Kuwait. Polish planners were embedded in Iraqi planning, administrative, educational, and research institutions, and this talk argues that this capillary infiltration impacted the plan for Baghdad's development. This impact will be demonstrated by means of GIS-based archival research, with particular attention paid to the transportation network, green spaces, housing typologies, and heritage protection.

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