

Reconstruction in an Age of Globalization

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, there has been a paradigm shift in recovery and reconstruction. In this new approach, the emphasis has been put on the “peacebuilding” role of recovery/reconstruction. However, such a process is not straightforward. Post-disaster reconstruction is a complex process strongly influenced by the social, economic, cultural and institutional context.

The reconstruction process has to be faced through a multidisciplinary approach. This requires to build up a theoretical framework articulated around certain concepts: Modernity and heritage, continuity and mutations, long term / short term, globalization and specific identities, transfer of technologies and local know-how.

New intra-state conflicts with non-state actors create complex political emergencies that result in the destruction of the affected population’s political, economic, sociocultural and healthcare infrastructures, in addition to forced population displacement. They differ from previous conflicts in the sense that they are the direct result of sectarian or ethnic violence.

A quarter of a century after the end of the Lebanese war and based on the Beirut case, this intervention will try to define the specificities of post-war reconstruction in an age of globalization.



[1] Jad Tabet (ed), Reconstruction of War-torn Cities, Conference Proceedings, Published by the Order of Engineers and Architects-Beirut, 1997

Almost 20 years ago, the International Union of Architects organized an international symposium in Beirut on the reconstruction of war-torn cities, in collaboration with the Lebanese Federation of Engineers and Architects^[1]. The Lebanese Civil War had just ended and the reconstruction of Beirut was still in its infancy. The demons of war had moved on to the countries of former Yugoslavia and the Dayton Agreement had just been signed, giving the illusion that post-cold war international cooperation was capable of finding viable solutions that would put an end to ethnic and sectarian conflicts. We thought these conflicts were the last expression of a century that had endured so many tragedies, like the tail of a comet that would soon disappear in the limbo of history. No one then could have imagined that the coming century would witness in its early years a new cycle of violence that would spread from Afghanistan and Iraq to Mali, Libya, Syria and Yemen and lead the world to this state of generalized latent warfare that we know today.

several themes expressed in the form of a duality of concepts: Modernity and heritage, continuity and mutations, long term v/s short term, globalization and specific identities, transfer of technologies and local know-how; as well as the involvement of local communities in the process of reconstruction.

Twenty years later, I have the impression that these same themes could still be used to apprehend the question of the reconstruction of war-torn cities.

Modernity and Heritage

The first of these recurrent themes, which seems to come back as a leitmotiv in all the debates on the reconstruction of war-torn cities, concerns the relationship between modernity and heritage. The history of various reconstruction experiences is crisscrossed by quarrels between “Olds and Moderns”, and between “Preservationists and Innovators”.

Do we have to construct or to re-construct? In other words, should we seek to restore things “as they were before”, or on the contrary, should we strive to build a better environment, designed on entirely new bases?

This question arises in the form of concrete choices: should we preserve old road patterns, or should we introduce new transportation grids, more in line with future developments? Would it be possible to reconcile the preservation of a centuries-old urban fabric, often crumbled and falling apart, with the necessity of revitalizing urban life, enhancing circulation schemes and improving urban services? Within the discourse on heritage protection, reconstruction has long been considered in the context of pure restoration. The reconstruction of the center of Warsaw after the Second World War appears as a particularly interesting case in this respect. In August 1944, during the Warsaw uprising, more than 85% of the city’s historic center was destroyed by Nazi troops. The reconstruction of the Old Town was implemented based on a project that privileged the reconstitution of all structures dating from the 14th to the 18th century on the basis of archival documents and drawings. The Warsaw reconstruction is thus commonly considered as the typical example of a restoration-based approach.

However, looking more thoroughly at the specificities of this particular case, we discover that the reconstructed city has little in common with the pre-war city since the selective memory favored to reconstitute the cityscape as it appeared in its “golden age” and not as it was immediately before the War. The decision was taken not to reconstruct 19th century additions as well as houses that were built in the courtyards of medieval buildings. Moreover, some urban blocks were deliberately not reconstructed in order to unveil the panorama of city walls as well as the view of the city from the banks of the Vistula river and new open public spaces were created in order to enhance the quality of urban life.^[2]

The reconstruction of the city of Le Havre on the banks of the Channel in French Normandy, heavily bombed during the Second World War, is another example of urban reconstruction. Contrary to the example of Warsaw, the approach adopted here did not propose to reconstitute

[2] Bogdan WYPOREK, The Reconstruction of Warsaw after the Second World War, in: Reconstruction of War-torn Cities, Conference Proceedings, Published by the Order of Engineers and Architects-Beirut, 1997, p.19-24

[3] Joseph ABRAM, Aux origines de l'Atelier du Havre, in: Villes Reconstituées du dessin au destin, Editions de l'Harmattan, Paris 1994, Volume 1, p.95-108.

[4] Unesco World Heritage Centre: Historic Centre of Warsaw, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/30/>, Le Havre the City Rebuilt by Auguste Perret, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1181/>

[5] Wolfgang THALER & Maroje MRDULJAS: Modernism In-Between : The Mediatory Architectures of Socialist Yugoslavia, Jovis Publishers, Berlin 2012.

[6] Alice MACAUX: Le projet de reconstruction du château de la ville de Berlin (Berliner Stadtschloss), Réflexion sur les problèmes posés par la reconstruction de monuments historiques, Mémoire de Master 2 Recherche « Patrimoine et Conservation-Restauration », Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Année universitaire 2010-2011

the old city but rather to build a new city, symbol of a reborn France. ^[3] This case is a remarkable example of post-war planning based on the systematic use of a modular grid and widespread prefabrication. However, although the reconstruction plan of Le Havre constituted a pioneering implementation of modern urban planning, the new plan integrated the city's previous layout and its historic structures, respecting the direction of the pre-existing main roads and connecting the reconstructed city to the surrounding fabric.

The reconstructed cities of Warsaw and Le Havre were both inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List^[4]. While these two examples are based on diametrically opposed approaches, they nonetheless represent two different ways of responding to the same problem, that of the modernization of the urban setting and the attitude towards heritage. But the very notion of heritage is far from being straightforward, since heritage, like tradition, is a social construct. After the implosion of the former Yugoslavia, a heated debate erupted among intellectual elites concerning the fate of the architectural and urban heritage of the Tito period that marked the city of Sarajevo and other cities of the country^[5]. The issue of the legacy of the Socialist past was also raised after the decision of the Russian government to reconstruct the Cathedral of Christ the Savior in Moscow, which was destroyed under Stalin in 1931 to be replaced by the Palace of the Soviet, which was never built. Similarly, the decision taken by the Berlin Rathaus to rebuild the Hohenzollern Palace, once a principal residence of the Kings of Prussia, which was destroyed in 1950 by the Communist authorities to be replaced by the Palace of the Republic, generated a heated debate on the memory of the "Osties"^[6].

Even nearer to our region, the heritage of the colonial era as well as that of Modernism are still often ignored, although they form part of our memory, in the same way as the remains of the Ottoman, Arab, Byzantine, Roman and Greek periods.

Faced with this multiplicity of situations and the extreme diversity of memorial traces, there is a great temptation to adopt a selective approach that retains from the past only that part which corresponds to the ideological choices carried by the main actors of the reconstruction project. The example of the reconstruction of downtown Beirut is particularly enlightening in this regard.

At the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1991, Beirut was a shattered city, a city deprived of its heart. A general amnesty was declared for all crimes and abuses committed during the war while post-war trauma produced a general aspiration among Lebanese society to erase the memory of violence. An ambitious project was launched for the reconstruction of the historic center of Beirut, entrusted to a private Real Estate Company named Solidere. Against the backdrop of an urban hecatomb where more than 80% of the buildings of the old center were demolished, the selective memory opted for the conservation of isolated fragments in the form of selected pieces where heritage became a mere tool for real estate promotion.

In this sense, the dialectic of modernity versus heritage became ultimately nothing more than the expression of a general problem, that of the social role of architectural and urban ideas and the way our vision of the present is affected by reinvented images of the past.

Continuities and mutations

The second theme we will address is that of the opposition between continuities and mutations. Is the reconstruction a simple reconstitution, a restarting of society before the disaster, a return to square one?

Rebuilding is, of course, a response to the urgent needs of battered populations, limiting the effects of the trauma produced by violence and preserving the benchmarks that ensure a minimum of social cohesion. In the case of civil wars, reconstruction is also intended to ensure a form of reconciliation between belligerents that allows the regulation of conflicts and the coexistence of various social communities in the same territory^[7].

Hence, the emphasis put on the “peacebuilding” role of recovery/reconstruction has led to a focus on symbolic cultural heritage potential to reconcile and “bridge” the divided societies. The desire to rebuild a destroyed symbolic artifact in a complex political context can also express the desire to neglect the traumatic separation produced by war. The old multicultural City of Mostar was largely destroyed during the 1990 conflict. The reconstruction of the old town and its iconic bridge in 2004 with the help of UNESCO has been presented as a symbol of reconciliation, international cooperation and the coexistence of different cultural, ethnic and religious communities. Though extraordinary for their scope, complexity, and symbolism, the efforts that revitalized Mostar’s historic district in architectural terms were nevertheless rarely synchronized with parallel rehabilitation programs in the political and social domains. The result was a lop-sided recovery in which the city regained its landmarks - most notably a facsimile reconstruction of the renowned Old Bridge - without regaining the public institutions that would provide income and reduce communal vulnerability^[8].

Post-trauma reconstruction appears therefore as a complex process shaped by various and sometimes contradictory dynamics that cannot be reduced to the traditional destruction / reconstruction categories. As it would be illusory to deny the transformations provoked by the war or induced by the socio-economic dynamics of the post-war period, the reconstruction is necessarily a real re-composition, a global reshuffling in the balance of power where various actors have more or less the possibility of asserting their rights.

This issue was raised in the debate on the reconstruction of Beirut Central District by Solidere, the private company to which the reconstruction project was entrusted. Most of the pre-war fabric was destroyed and local inhabitants were moved out and replaced by new stakeholders. The result was encroaching privatization and the creation of a “corporate-city”, a privileged enclave separated from its environment.

The reconstruction of the southern suburbs of Beirut, destroyed during the 2006 Israeli war is different, on the other hand,. Planned, organized, and supervised by a special private agency, Wa’d, established to this end by Jihad al-Bina’ (a Hezbollah affiliated NGO), the project’s main aim was to re-settle the 20,000 displaced dwellers of the neighborhoods in an estimated 200 apartment buildings, extending over 40 hectares. The Wa’d project strove to retain all local inhabitants and offer them the possibility to return to newly rebuilt

[7] ICOMOS guidance on Post Trauma Recovery and Reconstruction for World Heritage Cultural Properties, Paris 2017.

[8] Paddy GREER : Bridge-Building in Mostar, from Fragmented Stumbling Blocks to Overarching Narrative Solutions, in Post-Conflict Reconstruction, edited by Neil Ferguson, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, p.119-132



apartments similar in size and in the same location to the pre-war situation. But the marginalization of public authorities and the lack of interest given to public spaces resulted in increased territorial segregation and the creation of an enclave entirely dominated by a sectarian political party.

A quarter of a century after the launching of the Solidere project and twelve years after that of Wa'd, we see that, despite divergent visions of pre-war built forms (that Wa'd sought to replicate and Solidere to erase) and also despite divergent positions vis-à-vis pre-war dwellers (that Wa'd sought to re-settle on site and Solidere to permanently displace), the two private agencies displayed nonetheless similar modes of operation and both projects resulted in producing secluded and reclusive spaces, separated from the rest of the city^[9].

[9] Marwan GHANDOUR & Mona FAWAZ, *Spatial Erasure: Reconstruction Projects in Beirut*, in: *Art & East Quarterly*, Spring 2010.

Looking at these experiences, we are forced to notice that the constellations of factors that guided the war continue to exercise their influence on the abrupt, if not violent, reconfiguration of the urban territory. On the basis of the new post-war equilibriums, mechanisms were put in place to allow the renegotiation of the terms of power and modes of sociability. Although political agreements aimed at ensuring a form of "reconciliation" between the belligerents allowed the regulation of conflicts in terms that do not question the coexistence of various communities in the same national territory, we must not forget that conflict remains at the heart of politics. The renewal of the social bonds involves confrontation, competing strategies and attempts to change the balance of power.

The issue of the time scales

The third theme that we need to address is that of the different time scales of reconstruction.

Because they are prospective by their nature, reconstruction plans surpass the time of the human generation concerned by change, to reach another scale, that of the long-term history. Most of the reconstruction experiences throughout history have been the work of a generation that devoted all its energy to their implementation. These experiences have mobilized the efforts of entire societies for years, sometimes even decades. We can therefore understand that they have been marked by a common aspiration to go beyond the immedi-

ate responses to the specific problems generated by the destruction, to propose more holistic solutions. The theme of “the opportunity finally offered” is one of the recurring themes of all reconstructions. The key issue arising in this context is that of the definition of priorities. It is through this issue that many strategic options are unveiled and more profoundly, the orientation we intend to imprint on the evolution of society. In fact, all reconstruction experiments strove to reconcile the necessity of providing urgent responses to people’s needs with the implementation of a prospective project that would give the reconstructed cities a historic depth.

In fact, the success of any reconstruction process is largely dependent on the correct articulation between short-term needs of post disaster reconstruction and long-term disaster risk reduction. In this sense, it is fundamental that the contextual parameters that influence the vulnerability of the impacted communities be taken into account in the long-term reconstruction. In order to effectively reduce the gap between the short and long-term needs, new integrative approaches should be developed that tend to reduce the physical vulnerabilities of the built environment along with the sociocultural, economic and institutional vulnerabilities.

This issue is likely to be one of the major problems facing the historic cities of Syria, Iraq and Yemen as soon as the reconstruction process begins.

Reconstructing infrastructures, restoring water and sanitary networks, decontamination of “hot spots” to reduce the risk of epidemics related to the accumulation of waste as well as scientific assessment of sites affected by chemical weapons are among the priority tasks to insure the safe return of refugees. However, in the case of some historic cities listed on UNESCO World Heritage List, like the ancient city of Sanaa or the old city of Aleppo almost entirely destroyed by the fighting, the preservation of historic heritage represents a top priority in the reconstruction process. But this task cannot be addressed on a short-term basis since the identification of the remaining attributes that convey heritage values is essential prior to any reconstruction. It is crucial that the identification of these attributes be as complete as possible so that damage or loss can be systematically recorded,





appropriate mitigation measures be implemented, impact on the significance of the site be assessed, and options for recovery and supporting actions can be identified.

Globalization and local specificities

The fourth theme I would like to address is that of the relationship between globalization and local specificities.

Addressed in various ways since the industrial revolution and the introduction of mechanization, this question is raised in new terms with the emergence of the global market and the technological developments that are transforming the conditions of production as well as the mechanisms of distribution and consumption on a global scale. This phenomenon has seen rapid growth over the last two decades with the development of new communication strategies, the emergence of advanced technologies and the growth of new communication and transport channels. This rapid growth is taking place in parallel with the transformation of the world into a single market, across borders and nations. The reduction in production costs generalize consumption patterns, level market products and create new needs. Paradoxically however, global market and open borders produce unwanted backlash, exacerbating the dangers of exclusion and marginalization of some vulnerable population categories as well as surging tribalism. Unable to cope with the influx of innovations, traditional societies are subject to a violent shock that results in a dramatic break in the continuity of their history.

Here again, the example of the reconstruction of downtown Beirut is particularly enlightening. In the aftermath of the Oslo agreement, a peaceful solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seemed at reach. The project for the reconstruction of Beirut Central District was based on the assumption that the Lebanese capital would soon regain its role as a main business and financial center in a pacified Middle East, becoming a primary node in the global economic network. This ambitious plan that strove to transform the old Mediterranean town into a global city was scuppered by the failure of the peace process, leaving the reconstructed central district as an elitist, isolated urban fragment in the middle of an urban chaos marked by the sectarian divisions of the war.



Another issue is that of the role of international aid in disaster situations. While some forms of aid may appear inadequate because they do not take into account the real situations on the ground, they can also have a negative impact by preventing the establishment and development of local initiatives. In the absence of a special consideration given to the problems of the “receiving societies”, this aid may develop perverse processes whereby the forced introduction of imported technologies and the unilateral definition of priorities by the “donors” accentuate social fractures.

This issue will be central to the success of the reconstruction projects in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. The scale of destructions and the need to mobilize financial resources and technical skills require the involvement of the international community in the process of reconstruction. However, for international aid to become a factor of development, it is necessary to direct this aid towards strengthening the stabilizing and integrative factors present in the “receiving societies”, to organize reconstruction as a coherent process based on existing potentialities and to put up a clear strategy for capacity building.

Involvement of local communities

The fifth and final theme concerns the issue of the involvement of local communities in the reconstruction process.

Since post-disaster reconstruction is a complex process strongly influenced by the social, economic and institutional context of the affected communities, the correct understanding of the aspirations of these communities, often competing or conflicting, requires the early participation of all stakeholders. This participation is crucial, not only for managing the immediate post-disaster situation, but also for the mitigation efforts aiming at building societies that are more resilient. It is hence a key element of post-trauma recovery.

To conclude, it is clear that there has been a paradigm shift in recovery and reconstruction with the development of new innovative approaches in recent decades. These new approaches that put an emphasis on improving the resilience of war-torn societies, are equally interested in spaces, forms and material traces, processes, activities, images, representations, rhythms and temporalities. It is

through such a comprehensive approach that we must address today the question of the reconstruction of cities in a globalized world; an approach that privileges the attention to the collective memory that founds the identity of social groups, the acknowledgment of the role of historical stratification and the recognition of the shared inheritance to allow the renewal of social links, gender diversity, mediation and reconciliation.