POST WAR RECONSTRUCTION
THE LESSONS OF EUROPE

FRIDAY, 19 OCTOBER | AKSOB 903 | LAU BEIRUT

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8:30 to 9:45  Registration

9:45  Elie Haddad: Introduction

10:00  **Nicolas Bullock: Keynote Lecture**  
Learning from European Reconstruction after WWII

10:45  Coffee Break

11:15  **Session 1: Post War Reconstruction in France and Italy**  
Patrice Gourbin: French Reconstruction after World War II  
Raffaella Neri: Milan 1945, the Reconstruction. Modernity, Tradition, Continuity  
Giovanni Corbellini: Continuity and Gaps in Post-Fascist Italy

12:15  Discussion/ Q&A on Session 1

12:45  Lunch Break

2:00  **Session 2: The Polish Condition**  
Malgorzata Popiolek: Warsaw: A Reconstruction that Began Before the War  
Kinga Racon Leja: Reconstruction of Polish Cities on a European Background

2:45  Discussion/ Q&A on Session 2

3:15  Coffee Break

3:45  **Session 3: Utopian Visions**  
Virag Molnar: Utopian Visions in the Rubble  
Lukasz Stanek: Learning from Poland: Baghdad’s Master Plans

4:30  Discussion/ Q&A on Session 3

5:00  Jad Tabet, President of the Order of Engineers and Architects of Beirut  
Reconstruction in the Age of Globalization
Nicholas Bullock is Professor of Architectural and Planning History of the 20th Century (part-time) in Cambridge and also teaches at the Architectural Association. In the mid 1990s, he was a speaker at the Beirut conference organized by the Order of Architects to discuss the reconstruction of Lebanon after the civil war. His current research explores the way in which architecture and urbanism reflect the modernization of France in the 30 years after WWII. He has published widely on reconstruction in Europe after WWII and on the architecture, planning and housing of the late 19th and 20th centuries in Britain, France and Germany.

Learning from European Reconstruction after WWII

The symposium seeks to establish whether, after the devastation in parts of the Arab world, its reconstruction can profit from the lessons of European reconstruction after WWII. Naturally, much of the discussion will focus on what may be learnt from the experience of individual countries in both Western and Eastern Europe. The purpose of this introductory paper is to explore – looking across Europe – whether there are a number of common overarching themes that are to be found in one form or another in the rebuilding of each country, and whether these may be of value to reconstruction in the Arab World.

Examples of such themes might be the contrast between pre-war reliance on market forces and the new enhanced role played by the state in reconstruction, and the links between physical reconstruction and wider plans for transforming and modernizing post-war society. The paper will also touch on the tensions between programs of modernization and the attachment of so many to the lieux de mémoire, the memories and the physical reminders of the past, now irretrievably lost. How did these tensions shape the choice between simply rebuilding the past and the ambitions for radical reconstruction along CIAM principles?

Finally, the paper will conclude that the years of post-war reconstruction equipped Western Europe for the prosperity of the next 20 or so years, but raises the question whether, as wartime solidarities and the ideals of shared endeavor faded, the new order put in place by reconstruction served the interests of the many or the few?
French reconstruction after World War II

This paper will expound on the characteristics of the reconstruction process after World War II in France, and the urban and architectural forms that were put in place.

With the entire French territory hit by urban destruction, reconstruction was fully state-funded. For this purpose, the French government set up a specific ministry called MRU (Ministère de la reconstruction et de l’urbanisme) that implemented the same policy throughout the national territory. Restoring destroyed cities to their original state was not considered an option. The ambition was to take advantage of the opportunity to develop modern, functional, healthy and orderly, but also aesthetic cities, where history would be highlighted by urban planning. Thus, most of the ancient monuments were preserved and isolated, and new roads designed to render them visible.

In large cities, urban planning was rethought following the rules of classical French aesthetics and the imperatives of modernity: adaptation to the automobile, health, sunshine, equipment. The street network and the plot plan were completely redesigned. The MRU set up a system of evaluation of destroyed properties to enable a compensation equivalent (but not identical) to the disappeared housing.

This new urban modernity was not as radical as that advocated by the avant-garde of the CIAM. The urban design and the architecture that finally emerged were the outcome of compromises. A number of traditional features were retained, such as sloping roofs or the continuity of building elevations along streets. But there were also some experiments aimed at inventing new urban forms, which increased with time. French post-war reconstruction therefore appears as an urban laboratory, prefiguring the massive construction of housing in the 1960s and 1970s.

Even today, worldwide, many cities need rebuilding as a result of war destruction. The lesson that can be learned from the French reconstruction is its capacity to compromise in order to combine tradition and innovation. It allowed the victims to preserve the memory of the past and to adapt to a completely renovated living environment.

Our examples will be mainly the cities of Le Havre and Caen, which represent two different aspects of this reconstruction. But we will also draw on the reconstruction of Orléans, Saint-Malo, Saint-Lô and Lisieux, to illustrate the variety of solutions imagined in the fifties.
SPEAKERS

RAFFAELLA NERI

Raffaella Neri, industrial designer and architect, Ph.D. in Architectural Composition at the IUAV in Venice, is full professor in Architectural and Urban Composition at the Politecnico of Milan and part of the teaching board of the PhD course of the IUAV University in Venice. Her research mainly focuses on architectural theory, on the problem of urban project in the modern city and on the role of construction in architectural design. She participates to many architectural competitions; in 1996 she won the National Architectural Prize Luigi Cosenza. Some of Neri’s latest publications are: La ricostruzione dell’identità. L’isolato urbano a Milano dopo la guerra (in Ricostruzione Inventario Progetto, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2018); The Forms of Reinforced Concrete Construction: the Velasca Tower (in Defining the Architectural Space. Transmutation of Concrete, Cracovia 2017).

Milan 1945, the Reconstruction. Modernity, Tradition, Continuity

In the aftermath of World War II, in 1945, Milan was largely destroyed. Monuments and houses, parks and transportation systems – in effect, the whole city and its center – were heavily damaged. The age of reconstruction was faced with a host of problems that posed important architectural and theoretical questions: the loss of a great number of monuments that represented the identity of the city, the destruction of many historical residential blocks and the large need for housing – a pre-war concern – that would increase in the following two decades due to industrial development. Tackling these problems led to a renewal of architecture and the city.

During this period, an important school of architects was forming in Milan – at the time, one of the most vital cities in Italy for its cultural and economic activities – together with a group of intellectuals, philosophers, poets and artists. The head of this group of architects working in both Milan and Venice (Albini, Gardella, Figini e Pollini, Bottoni) was Ernesto Rogers, the director of Casabella Continuità, the leading architectural magazine at the time.

To be truly modern, he claimed it was necessary to look at history and study the construction principles of historical cities: not to imitate forms but to preserve their own identity. The idea of continuity would bridge tradition and modernity. But what did continuity mean in architecture and which direction did this research take?

One of the most outstanding and discussed results of these ideas was the Velasca Tower, the first modern high-rise building in reinforced concrete built in the historical city center: a new typology realized with modern materials, with shapes that seemed to refer to Milan’s medieval history. The architectural team was BBPR (Banfi, Belgiojoso, Peressutti, Rogers) together with a well-known engineer, Arturo Danusso. It was too modern, and at the same time too old. For this reason, the English critic Reyner Banham accused the Italian architects of retreating from modern architecture.

This debate marked a change in Italian architecture.

Few relevant monuments were rebuilt or restored as they were before the war – such as the Teatro alla Scala and some partially destroyed churches – and other public buildings were completed in different forms, like the Renaissance-era Ospedale Maggiore by Filarete. But the best built projects attempted to overcome both the philological reconstruction and the last experiences of the International Style, while facing the problems of the construction principles of the city and of the role of green spaces as collective urban places. The research moving toward a modern architecture that was closely related to the idea of tradition was especially applied to the reconstruction of the residential blocks of the city center – projects by Bottoni, Asnago e Vender, Moretti – and to the construction of the new settlements – QT8, Harar and Feltre among the most interesting ones.

In the meantime, scientific studies of the city, its structure and its architecture took root; the research on the relationships between typology and morphology originated from this interest to better understand historical cities so that the history of each may continue.
Reconstructing Architects: Continuity and Gaps in Post-Fascist Italy

The end of WWII in Italy witnessed a long-hoped-for and difficult political change, from Mussolini’s dictatorship to a fragile democracy, whose issues inevitably intersected with those of architecture. Fascism acted for two decades as a contradictory factor of development, mixing Roman imperial rhetoric with the myth of youth, reactionary social politics with radical urban transformations, and rural tradition and industrialization. In Marshall Berman’s terms, it pursued modernization (of technology, infrastructures, communication…) by getting rid of modernity (as liberation of individuals from the constraints of family, religion, gender…), with some awkward consequences. The huge gaps created by the wartime destruction in Italian cities came after other – sometimes deeper – wounds inflicted by the fascist regime on their historic urban fabrics, more than often transformed without any reference to the previous situations.

The demolitions of the Borgo’s spine in Rome, or Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia, and many others already treated the very city centers as modernist tabulae rasae. Radical interventions, such as the reconstruction of Rotterdam or Le Havre, were therefore less conceivable in the Italian situation after the war, not only because of a more fragmented power and difficult financing, but also because of the need for a different representation of the social bodies involved in the reconstruction.

This need, in turn, affected the architectural languages. Unlike Nazi Germany, which operated a clear aesthetic choice condemning modernism as a ‘degenerate art,’ Italy pursued more eclectic architectural policy, connecting to its ideology the approaches of the few designers – such as Libera, Moretti, Pagano, Terragni, Vaccaro, who were able to get in tune with the most advanced expressions of the time. The anti-fascist Italy that emerged from the war asked for a different representation. Therefore, besides the many difficulties Italian architects had to tackle in reconstructing their cities, they also had to cope with a serious reconsideration of the tools of their own discipline in order to overcome methods and outcomes associated with Mussolini’s rule. The tricky layering of both the need for continuity (with history, of the urban fabric, of the communities involved…) and discontinuity (from the political choices that precipitated Italy into a bloody conflict and from everything that brought them to mind) became central in the architectural reflection about reconstruction: an endeavor that went far beyond the sheer recovery of the war destructions. The exposure to these latter issues and to what they represented changed the attitude of Italian architects, and led them to anticipate a critical approach toward the Modern Movement, questioning local identities and the relationship with those contextual constraints that Ernesto Nathan Rogers will define as ‘environmental pre-existences.’

This paper will explore some of the ambiguities the issue of continuity proposed to the architectural representation of the social bodies involved in the reconstruction. 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.
Learning from Poland: Baghdad’s Master Plans (1967, 1973)

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 link with the building process 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 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.

Warsaw: A Reconstruction that Began Before the War

The demolition of the capital city of Poland during World War II was a unique act of the systematic annihilation of a city and its historical roots. The so-called Office for the Rebuilding of the Capital City managed to reconstruct not just the monuments, which were crucial for the city landscape, but entire streets and city structures, including the historical city center. The restored Warsaw Old Town subsequently became a national monument of Polish heroism, listed in 1980 by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The rebuilt Warsaw Old Town is usually seen as an example of the most faithful, comprehensive, and complete reconstruction in the history of architecture. However, its restoration was not just a reproduction of the pre-war urban fabric, but a combination of a romantic vision of history, on the one hand, and 20th-century pragmatism, on the other. By demolishing particular buildings and rebuilding others, political and planning authorities sought to rewrite the history of the city. At the same time, they saw the complete destruction of the city as an opportunity to modernize its architecture and to finally upgrade the poor living conditions in the Warsaw apartments to meet 20th-century hygiene standards.

While looking for the source of inspiration for the reconstruction of Warsaw monuments, one can see a clear continuation of the pre-war urban planning and architecture, which is especially visible in the early years of Warsaw’s reconstruction. The urban renewal program introduced in the Warsaw Old Town shows also some similarities with the projects carried out in the 1930s in Germany, Switzerland and Italy. Polish architects, as well as conservationists, had been intensively working on urban renewal and restoration projects for the city since the 1930s and had continued their work during the war. For political reasons, they rarely mentioned their pre-war activities after 1945. Admitting that they could work on their projects in wartime was taboo, as it could have been perceived as collaboration with the enemy.

My presentation will showcase some of the research findings from my doctoral dissertation, in which I argue that the manner in which Warsaw’s monuments were reconstructed in fact evinced a unique mixture of contrasting tendencies. The attempt to somehow recover the shape of the city from the time before industrialization in the second half of the 19th century, recalling the vaunted epoch of Polish economic and political prosperity, coexisted with socialist aesthetic doctrines and new building technologies.
The study shows the phases of post-Second World War processes of the rebuilding Polish cities. The factor of times seemed to be a crucial element in the evaluation, showing the changing attitudes and directions. The vast destruction of Poland during the war and enormous demographic movements as post-war consequences of shifted country borders greatly complicated further actions. The distinct Polish political situation caused major problems in understanding the identity of the cities to be rebuilt, leading to a choice between a historical reconstruction on the one hand, or a rejection of historical context on the other. These choices were strongly affected by the ideologies of Socialist Realism, Modernism, and later Post-Modernism, with its nostalgia for historicism. However the specificity of the processes showed a strong tendency among Polish architects for reconstruction. The scale and the methods of the rebuilding processes varied, which was the case of bigger cities – i.e. Warsaw, Gdańsk, Poznań or Wrocław. In some smaller cities attempts to restore the former market places took place—presently exemplified by Opole, Kazimierz Dolny, Racibórz or Bołków. During the post-war processes multiple mistakes and missteps were committed. The difficulties involved the lack of survey materials and a lack of qualified architects and planners. The replacement of the populations of cities became the most crucial matter—a typical condition in so-called Reclaimed Lands. The reconstruction was sometimes loosely conducted, leading to the stylisation of architecture. Other improvements involved reduced density or functional transpositions on the city centres. One instance of material for comparison are cities that have been divided by state borders, such as Görlitz-Zgorzelec or Frankfurt (Oder)-Słubice. The decades that followed the 1980’s brought with them distinct examples of reconstruction, carried out in the form of retroversion – in the cases of Ełbąg and other cities.

The processes listed by the author involve the clearing of debris and ruins, planning and re-evaluation regarding successive phases of the rebuilding processes. The summarising conclusions involve the evaluation of rebuilding processes based on the issues of: holistic continuation of the process, urban continuity, cultural heritage and “memory places” protection and most of all social engagement. The paper refers to the research conducted in recent years on the “Contemporary conditions of the cities impacted by the Second World War”. Processes of Reconstruction of Polish Cities on European Background

KINGA RACON-LEJA

KINGA RACON-LEJA is Assistant Professor and Vice Director of the Institute of Urban Design of the Faculty of Architecture at Cracow University of Technology [CUT]. She holds an MA in Architecture and a Doctorate from CUT, completed in 1995 and 2003 respectively, the latter partially conducted at Instituto Universitario di Architettura di Venezia. In 1992-93, Racon-Leja received a scholarship to study at the University of Tennessee in the USA. Her research and didactic work concentrate on urban processes. She is the author and co-author of over 40 scientific publications. In 2003-2008 Racon-Leja was involved in the research on socially-safe housing estates, as opposed to the gated communities in Poland. In 2002-2012 she was the general coordinator of the project ‘Facing Impact of the Second World War: Urban Design in Contemporary European Cities’, addressing the present condition of cities – Oswiecim / Auschwitz, Rotterdam and Dresden. This project continued leading to the publication “City and A War”. The program was awarded as the best Erasmus project in Higher Education in 2014. Racon-Leja also worked with HAWK Hildesheim, conducting a series of workshops on the cities of Wrocław, Görlitz/Zgorzelec and Słubice/Frankfurt Oder (2012-2016). She also participated in workshops on depopulation of Saxony-Anhalt, e.g. Schierke, Halle Neustadt, Magdeburg Dresden (2013-2018), followed by a project on Gothenburg /Sweden in 2018, with TU Delft, University of Gent and Chalmers University. In addition to her research on cities, Racon-Leja is engaged in architectural and urban practice within Studio L / Marek Leja.

Utopian Visions in the Rubble: Constructing a New City versus Reconstructing the Old in Postwar Budapest

Virág Molnár received her Ph.D. from Princeton University and is currently Associate Professor of Sociology at the New School for Social Research. Her research explores the intersections of culture, politics, social change and knowledge production in Eastern Europe, with special focus on urban culture, the built environment, new communications technologies, and the material culture of nationalism. She has written about the relationship between architecture and state formation in socialist and post-socialist Eastern Europe, the post-1989 reconstruction of Berlin, and the new housing landscape of post-socialist cities. Current work examines the impact of new communication technologies on the urban public sphere and of a study of the street art scene in New York, Berlin and Budapest; the politics of urban gentrification; and the rise of radical populism in contemporary Hungary. Her book Building the State Architecture, Politics, and State Formation in Postwar Central Europe (Routledge, 2013) received the 2014 Mary Douglas Prize from the American Sociological Association. Her work has also appeared in the American Sociological Review, Annual Review of Sociology, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, and Urban Sociology. She has been a visiting fellow at the Minda de Gunzburg Center for European Studies at Harvard University, the Humboldt Universität in Berlin, and the American Academy in Berlin. Her research has been supported by the National Science Foundation, Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Marie Curie Intra-European fellowship, and the American Council of Learned Societies, among others.

Virág Molnár

The siege of Budapest was among the longest and bloodiest of the urban battles of World War II. It lasted a total of 102 days from October 29, 1944 to February 14, 1945 when the city unconditionally surrendered to the Red Army of the Soviet Union. In stark contrast, Berlin was taken in two weeks, Vienna in six days while Paris and most other European capitals – with the exception of Warsaw – never became battlefields during the war. The scale of fighting and destruction was comparable only with the sieges of Leningrad, Stalingrad, and Warsaw, namely the most devastating episodes of urban warfare during World War II. The physical and human toll of the war was enormous. Hardest hit of all were the public representative buildings that encapsulated the nation’s history and cultural identity. The Castle District in the Buda Hill overlooking the Danube lay in ruins. Architectural landmarks that defined the Danube skyline were destroyed beyond repair. Yet, the collapsed bridges across the Danube will probably remain the most painful symbol of devastation. All seven bridges were methodically blown up by withdrawing German troops during the siege. The loss of the bridges was also more than just symbolic: they functioned as important arteries of everyday life connecting not only the twin cities of Buda and Pest but the Eastern and Western halves of the country. Even though the clearing away of debris and rebuilding efforts began immediately after the end of the siege, three years later in 1948 most building activity was still devoted to basic repairs of damaged buildings and infrastructure. The reconstruction of key public buildings was even more protracted: the Buda Castle was completed only in 1966 while the art nouveau Elisabeth Bridge, destroyed in the war, was replaced by a modern suspension bridge in 1964.

Nevertheless, in the eyes of architects and urban planners the havoc wreaked by the war presented a unique opportunity to rectify the urban planning and development mistakes of earlier periods. The few new buildings that began to sprout among the ruins in the years between 1944 and 1949 that carried the promise of a new beginning. Planners and architects passionately debated the need to “build the city anew” as opposed to simply “reconstructing the ruins.” New architectural and urban planning journals, as well as the first post-war architectural and urban planning competitions offered lively forums to these efforts to fundamentally rethink the city. My paper will focus on the utopian visions that were hatched in these discussions and competitions, and that played a central role in the immediate aftermath of the war before the communist political takeover in 1948 and the coercive introduction of Soviet architectural and planning policies in the early 1950s. First, the paper will show that generating utopian visions in a series of open architectural competitions held immediately after the war in 1945 was, in itself, a significant part of the reconstruction process. Second, it will highlight why and how such utopian blueprints are consequential even if they never materialize, and why unbuilt plans remain an indispensable part of the urban and architectural imagination.

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