

RECONSTRUCTION DISPUTES

Exhibition presented as part of the 7th Warsaw Under Construction Festival organized by the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and the Museum of Warsaw

October 10–November 10, 2015

Opening: October 10, 8 pm

**Venue: the former building of the 9th Klementyna Hoffmanowa Highschool
Emilii Plater 29, Warsaw**

Open: Tuesday–Sunday 12 pm–8 pm

The reconstruction of Warsaw that began 70 years ago was a result of discussions about how and where to live, which engaged urban planners from the beginning of the XX century. The exhibition presents how a modern city was created and what the main lines of disagreement were. Today, with spatial planning tapering off in the public debate, the impact of the assumptions behind the reconstruction on the capital's current shape is repeatedly ignored. After 1989 the process of mythologizing inter-wars Warsaw gained momentum. We are frequently confronted with opinions that place pre-war Warsaw over the contemporary city. The fact that Warsaw of the day lacked appropriate infrastructure and green areas and was tragically overpopulated is often brushed aside.

The main exhibition of the seventh edition of the Warsaw Under Construction festival presents the post-war reconstruction as a means of overcoming crisis. Contrary to what is being suggested, the decision providing for the reconstruction of the city was neither a whim of the communist authorities, nor an expression of emotions, but a planning method deeply rooted in discussions that had engaged the city planners before the city's destruction in 1944. We need to admit that despite the failure to save all buildings and the demolition of some for planning or political reasons, the planners from the Warsaw Reconstruction Office managed to work out an idea of the city that not only performs central administrative functions, but has successfully regained its residents, obtained a new architectural face and become a truly green city.

The dispute is not limited to our times – after 1945 various points of view clashed and each party had a solid substantial basis. The fundamental question was whether to reconstruct or whether to design and build from a scratch. The proponents of the solutions adopted by the Warsaw Reconstruction Office underline that this concept managed to provide a link between planning and avant-garde thought as well as Modern Movement's architectural ideas and – in a broader sense – it was linked to the modernization process – even if abrupt, as it resulted from the unique scale of destruction and not only from the ideology imposed by the new authorities.

So, if to reconstruct, then what to reconstruct? Jan Zachwatowicz – a conservator – opted for rebuilding of the entirety or the majority of objects destroyed by the war. The exhibition presents the Old Town reconstruction projects as well as the achievements of the Old Warsaw Research Commission, initiated by Stanisław Żaryn. Architects-conservators justified the reconstruction of culture monuments by the need to educate future generations. Others opposed the reconstruction of historic buildings declaring the need for new investments, provided arguments related to high costs of reconstructing historic buildings or even questioned the historic value of buildings that had survived. They did not want to save either the cramped urban development from the turn of XIX and XX century, or historicizing or art-deco buildings, as they did not perceive them as valuable, but rather as symptoms of bad taste and capitalist speculation. Finally, the possibilities of logical development were prioritized. This idea stood in stark contrast with the overpopulation of the central parts of the pre-war city.

The exhibition shows how architects and urban planners made use of a tragic paradox – the destruction of the city was used to improve living standards of its future residents. Therefore, in order to help understand the assumptions behind the reconstruction of Warsaw, the exhibition focuses on urban planning processes, instead of on particular objects. Debates on the capital function of the city, on the reconstruction of the first street (Nowy Świat), on Maciej Nowicki's visionary designs and the most important projects of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office form the axis of the exhibition. Thanks to cooperation with the National Digital Archives, the unique photos taken by Eugenia Trzeciakowa will be displayed for the first time ever.

The triumphs of the reconstruction include the delimitation of a historic district, preservation of the Warsaw Escarpment as a green heart of the city, providing residents with the inflow of fresh air owing to ventilation corridors as well as indicating state administration, higher education or rail transport areas. Emphasis was placed on the improvement of the housing situation and alarming pre-war statistics. We have been using public and open spaces shaped at that time to this very day.

The Municipalization Decree issued in October 1945, the so-called “Bierut's Decree”, which took the right of ownership away from the owners of the land deemed crucial for the reconstruction of the city, allowed the execution of large-scale investments and the construction of necessary infrastructure. Today, in the reprivatization age, the ownership rights have become an overriding value. Perhaps this is the reason why thinking along the lines of a comprehensive urban plan seldom meets deserved recognition. We need to remember that the post-war municipalization was not just an act imposed by the new, communist authorities – it also resulted from the experiences of architects and urban planners and their understanding of the public interest.

The capital city of Poland was one of the most tragic victims of the Second World War, but the toll of destruction in Europe included over a thousand cities and twenty four million houses. The exhibition compares Warsaw reconstruction plans with the main assumptions behind the reconstruction of other cities, such as Berlin, Dresden, Minsk, Le Havre and Rotterdam, which allows us to better grasp the specificity of new urban planning in Warsaw.

Discussions on spatial planning and order are pushed aside in the public debate in favour of current renovations, improving the urban aesthetics and preserving or rebuilding particular objects. The contribution of the reconstruction to the present shape of Warsaw is often ignored. Understanding of this process can galvanize positive change and stimulate comprehensive thinking about the future of Warsaw – after all, the city's contemporary urban tissue and spatial order were defined as a result of decisions made 70 years ago, when raising Warsaw from ruins began.

More at www.warszawawbudowie.pl

Organisers: The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw and the Museum of Warsaw

Curator: Tomasz Fudala, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

Curatorial cooperation: Szymon Maliborski, Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

Production: Joanna Trytek, Julia Missala with the team of the Museum of Warsaw

Exhibition design: Maciej Siuda

Graphic design: Piotr Chuchla

Festival identity: Ludovic Balland Typography Cabinet

The Warsaw Under Construction festival was organised thanks to financial support of the Capital City of Warsaw.

Partners:

The School of Architecture, Design and Civil Engineering ZHAW Winterthur

Faculty of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology

National Digital Archives

Warsaw State Archive

The Warsaw Branch of SARP

Zamoyski Museum in Kozłówka

The Polish Institute in Tel Aviv

Kolektyw Syrena

1500m2

Contact details:

The Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw

ul. Pańska 3

00-124 Warszawa

www.artmuseum.pl

prasa@artmuseum.pl

+48 22 596 40 23

+48 535 500 552

The Museum of Warsaw

Rynek Starego Miasta 28-42

00-272 Warszawa

www.muzeumwarszawy.pl