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# Comparing and contrasting the post-1945 re-building of Warsaw and Minsk city centres

*Podobieństwa i kontrasty w powojennej odbudowie śródmiejskich dzielnic Warszawy i Mińska*

*Падобнае і адрознае ў пасляваенным аднаўленні цэнтральных раёнаў Варшавы і Мінска*

**ABSTRACT:** The so-called “Stalinist episode” (1948/9–1955/6 in Warsaw; 1945 dragged out to the late-1950s in Soviet-held Minsk) was of crucial significance to both cities, being marked by intensive construction work primarily focused on the respective city centres. In Warsaw, this was a brief and highly-charged seven or so years intricately intertwined with setting up the Polish People’s Republic. The foundations were thus laid for a so-called socialist capital city, characterised by ‘communalisation’ of property, zealous architects enjoying Party favour and ripping down the burnt-out ruins of a great many readily restorable buildings; above all tenement houses from the anathematised «bourgeois-capitalist» era of c.1850–1914. Re-building in the capital of the BSSR still enjoys wide recognition for transforming it into a million+ city. The obliterated main street became the showpiece Stalin (now Independence) Avenue; Lenin, Engels, Karl Marks, other central streets undergoing partial redevelopment. While key historic monuments were ripped down, the still prominent remnant architecture from c.1850–1914 was typically restored, heightened or readapted to suit the Stalinist aesthetic. ‘Historic Minsk’ began to be reinvented after 1991. Summary reference is additionally made to the respective pre-1939 and pre-1941 urban-architectural profiles of Warsaw and Minsk, their wartime destruction and continued urban redevelopment beyond the key Stalinist ‘episode’ that had defined vital aspects of the post-1945 built urban environment.

**KEYWORDS:** urbanity, architecture, rebuilding, reconstruction, reconstitution, urban redevelopment.

The history of Poland from the outbreak of World War Two in September 1939 to June 1989 was determined by much the same uncontrollable outside forces as that of Belarus between June 1941 and break-up of the USSR in July 1991. Nazi Germany's genocidal occupation of Warsaw endured well over 18 months longer than that of Minsk. The planned slaughter of Jewish and campaign of terror against Slav inhabitants, no less than heavy destruction of building stock, emphasise an analogous degree of disaster inflicted on the two cities. This marked a watershed in their respective urban, architectural and social histories; reflecting the appalling loss of life and cataclysmic ruination inflicted on both countries. Poland was the third most extensively war-ravaged European country after the two totalitarian states responsible: Germany and the USSR. Belarus is estimated to have lost as much as a quarter of its pre-1941 population.

The horrors of war gave way to a post-war prolongation of Stalinist-Soviet administration in Minsk, as chief city to the 'Byelorussian' Soviet Socialist State (BCCP) with its 'restored' western borders. Warsaw's brutally delayed 'liberation' on January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1945 by the Red Army, with supporting detachments of the Polish People's Army, doomed post-war Poland to Moscow's control of its foreign affairs and interference in domestic policies. Not only was the country isolated from its British and US allies but Soviet incorporation by force of arms primarily of Wilno (Vilna, Vilnius) and Lwów (L'viv, L'vov) broke its historic links with Ukraine and Belarus, now wholly 'gobbled up' by the Soviet Union, along with Lithuania and Latvia. Placed in a block of Russian-dominated **people's republics**, Poland was effectively cut off from Western Europe behind an **Iron Curtain** well to the West even of its historic new frontier along the Rivers Oder (Odra) and Neisse (Nysa).

The post-war rebuilding of Warsaw and Minsk, which again lay within the same geopolitical system, was determined by Soviet overlordship. For the respective state authorities – in Poland only recently instated due to Moscow's overwhelmingly victorious armed forces – it was of crucial importance to devise a school of planning and architectural design to emphatically contrast with the culturally borderless, internationalist modernism shaping post-1945 reconstruction and redevelopment in the so-called 'West'. With the outbreak of war in Korea and onset of McCarthyism, the United States proved every bit as eager to underline the 'East'- 'West' break as the Soviet Union under Stalin. As a consequence, the cultural identity of Europe, 'after the rain' of World War Two, divided down the middle into US- and USSR-dominated zones/spheres, was severely weakened.

## Summarized history of Warsaw and Minsk

Minsk is very much the older of the two cities, being first recorded in the year 1067 (as *Mensk*), when the armies of Kiev defeated those of Polotsk on the banks of the River Nemiga (*Niamiga*). A fortified town existed on a site completely liquidated in the 1960s, above the River Svisloch (*Svislač*) and protected by the Nemiga tributary. The name Warsaw, on the other hand, first appeared (as *Warszowa*) only in 1339, at the tail end of a series of settlements of a heavily forested area along the Vistula. Its older history is connected with the river's east bank, where a string of trading settlements arose, united in 1648 as a single town and Warsaw's future, long maligned right-bank suburb: Praga. The Mazovian Dukes had built a residence on the site of today's Royal Castle (rebuilt from 1971), the fortified town securing municipal rights based on those of Chełmno (*Kulm*) in 1413. By the time Minsk had its own town charter, based on that of Magdeburg, in 1499, it had long since enjoyed the protection of Lithuania (1242), after Kievan Rus had been ripped apart by the Mongol Invasions (1237–1239). A new urban core took shape in the Upper Town (*Verkhni Gorod*) and the town became an administrative centre of its own voivodship (*województwo*). Not incorporated into the Kingdom of Poland until 1526, the former Mazovian capital's vaguely central location between Cracow and Vilna, as well as even the *Rzeczpospolita* after the Union of Lublin (1569), led to it becoming the new site for Sejm sessions and gathering point for the election of post-Jagiellonian monarchs, among whom was Sigismund III Vasa who had his court transferred here in 1596.

The glories, terrible wars and profound social divisions culminating in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's downfall caused a greater impact on the urban form and architecture of Warsaw than any other urban centre of the four successor states. Suffering prolonged Russian occupation (1654–1667), a brief Swedish one (1708–1709) and the stifling manorial economy, Minsk had barely begun to recover in 1790, when its population was under 7000 and new building still confined within its 17th-century fortifications. During the economically and culturally beneficial reign of Stanislaus Augustus, Warsaw experienced its first of two unprecedented periods of rapid growth as a leading urban centre of the late 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment, with an estimated 120,000 inhabitants. The Lubomirski Defences laid out in 1770, encompassing 28 private, magnate- and noble-owned townships (*jurydyki*), determined the street plan, and thus urban layout, of 19th and early 20th-century Central Warsaw.

Seized by Russia in the Second Partition (1793), Minsk was subjected to Russian Classicism and urban planning with a new centre focussed on

Zakharyevskaya Street and side streets laid out at right angles to each other. All hopes of breaking Tsarist rule were dashed by the defeat of Napoleon's Grande Armée (1807), ensued by the November (1830) and January (1863) Uprisings whose crushing first induced outlawing the of Polish and Belarusian to finally invoke Russification. The steam age and industrialisation brought rapid urban and demographic growth, c.91,500 Jews (an absolute majority), Russians, Poles and Belarusians being recorded in the 1897 census; 111,000 by 1910.

First occupied by Prussia (1795–1806), Warsaw's geopolitical history resembled that of Minsk, albeit it served as capital to the truncated Duchy of Warsaw (1807–1813) and autonomous Congress Kingdom under Russian 'protection' (1815–1830). Suppression of the November Uprising led to the ripping down of the Fawory and Żoliborz inner-north districts to make way for the Russian Citadel (1832–1836), its esplanade being further expanded in 1854–1856 and 1872. The Repercussions of the January Uprising were two-sided. The Huge economic gains that followed the removal of the customs border between the Russian Empire and dissolved Congress Kingdom (renamed *Privislinskiy Kraj* in Russian) contrasted with Russification and a vast network of bastions and military fortifications girdling the city. This second period of unprecedented urban development lasted a full half century (1864–1914), during which the city's population quintupled to 884,500. Exclusion of the outer urban periphery hid the fact that the metropolis had exceeded one million inhabitants before the outbreak of World War I [Cegielski 1964: 19]. In wartime Warsaw there was famine, population decline and confiscation of industrial machinery, but it escaped serious destruction.

The installing of Soviet power over Minsk and Eastern Belarus issued out of Belarusian weakness, working-class revolutionary fervour and the Poles' failure to unite Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic States into a federation (Józef Piłsudski's goal of great power was to counter future threat from Germany or Russia). Long overshadowed by Vilna and Grodno, Vitebsk and Mogilev, Minsk had been declared chief city of the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic. Urban growth resumed: new factories, schools, hospitals, theatres, cinemas, etc. went up, the Belarusian language and culture were institutionally encouraged. Well away from the Tsarist-era centre and pre-industrial Upper Town, a new, Soviet urban core was planned around the vast House of Government (I. Langbard, 1933), at the western end of Zakharyevskaya (renamed Sovietskaya) Street where Lenin Square was planned. Iosif Langbard designed a series of key and/or monumental edifices, including the Belarusian Academy and enormous Theatre of Opera and Ballet (1939); taking over in both cases from G. Lavrov, whose blatantly Constructivist designs had provoked harsh criticism. The House of the Red Army (1939) even involved

adapting the pre-existing archbishops' residence [Zadorin 2018: 168–173, 244–249, 298–299]. Impressive though this show-piece architecture was, it loomed over the pre-1914 city in a way suggestive of sounding a death knell for pre-1914 Minsk. By 1939 the population had doubled to c. 239,000.

Polish independence inside its post-Treaty of Riga, pro-nationalist borders restored to Warsaw the status of capital city, but war and revolution cut it off from Russian markets. The population rose to 1,265,000, by 1937. Municipal administration directed assimilation of the long excluded suburbs, but failed to support the planned building of working-class homes. Poor living conditions in parts of inner-central districts improved little, overcrowding even increased [Dąbrowski and Koskowski, 1964]. Government-supported housing 'colonies' in the newly laid-out district of Żoliborz, in Rakowiec and small pockets of the City Centre were built in the 'manor house' style (*styl dworski*) for military personnel, teachers and other state employees [Heyman 1976]. Stripped 'new' classicism (ministry building at 25 Szucha Ave., Z. Mączyński, 1930) and grandiose modernism for banks, government and municipal edifices (e.g. R. Świeczyński's National Economy Bank and Ministry of Transport, both completed in 1931, the Warsaw Courts by B. Pniewski, 1939) largely prevailed over the avant-garde and fonctionnalism, e. g. of the Syrkus and Brukalski architect couples. Work on a vast new administrative district south of the densely built-up city centre, named for Piłsudski (1867–1935) and featuring a towering Temple of Providence, was barely under way when Nazi Germany invaded.

## **Destruction**

Warsaw was subjected to apocalyptic wartime destruction over the course of virtually the entire war. The Nazi German air raids of September 1939, through suppression of the civilian population, Nazi plans to reduce it to a *Neue Deutsches Stadt* of barely 100,000 *Übermenschen* and inflicting a holocaust on the city's c.350,000 Jewry, to horrendous suppression of the Ghetto Uprising (April-May 1943) and catastrophic Warsaw Uprising (August-October 1944) ended with forced evacuation of the left-bank agglomeration's populace. Then flame throwing central-urban neighbourhoods and dynamiting major public edifices ensued [Bartoszewski 1974].

Minsk had long been many times smaller than Warsaw, but by the late-1930s the gap had closed to about five times. While spared Nazi attempts to liquidate it, Minsk also suffered appalling destruction and loss of life, caused primarily by *Blitzkrieg* tactics during the invasion of June 1941, mass murder of Jews and near constant war from 1942 with partisan groups in the surrounding forests and abominable consequences for villager who supported

them [Klimov 1985]. The greatest toll to Warsaw's architecture and unique urban character is associated with Stalin's refusal to support the Polish Insurgents after the Uprising had broken out, dragging on for an agonising 63 days. At Minsk heavy destruction was inflicted during Operation Bagration which rapidly forced the Germans into retreat, on 7<sup>th</sup> July 1944 [*Минск во время...*, online]. A crucial factor typically avoided in official sources was intense Soviet aerial bombing aimed at obliterating specific parts of the City Centre.

Planes bombed Minsk not only on Soviet anniversaries but also during religious holidays. For Stalin all who found themselves on the wrong side of the front were enemies to be got rid of. In one of these air raids the church of the Bernadine Sisters was struck during a mass to mark Passover. Not only planes destroyed Minsk, the main losses having occurred in the storming of the city in 1944. Nevertheless, the Soviet air force played a crucial role in clearing a giant building site where construction began after the war on devising an ideal urban geometry for an ideal social geometry [Klinau 2020: 81].

It is important to establish the true scale of wartime physical destruction with the degree of accuracy necessary to assess the extent to which post-war rebuilding occurred at the cost of surviving architecture. According to the official statistics provided, Minsk lost 85% of its building stock. The population plummeted to c. 50,000 (1944), but the number of civilian deaths was less dramatic, so many *Minczanie* having escaped to the forests. Figures on Warsaw's obliteration varied tellingly between 65% and as high as 85% of the pre-war city's urban landscape, infrastructure and even parks. A shocking estimate was produced that anything between 600,000 and 800,000 Varsovians had lost their lives [Ciborski 1969: 40, 64]. Be that as it may, while the population had crashed to 162,000, it rapidly rose through Varsovians returning from all over Europe and the USSR. Bloating estimates on the city's human losses and physical destruction was supposed to underline the post-war regime's achievements. This changed from the mid-1980s, when official statistics became so much easier to question and have revised to nearer around 500,000 murdered Warsaw Jews and Poles and overall level of destruction of around 70%, varying considerably from one pre-1951 central district (*okrąg*) to another; i.e. from 95% for Muranów, site of the Great Ghetto, to under 50% for some central-southern *okręgi* south of Jerusalem Avenue, while damage in inner and especially outer-urban areas fell considerably [*Atlas Warszawy*. 1975].

In Minsk extensive demolition was to be carried out to accommodate grand urban projects from the late-1940s, but above all from the mid-1960s to mid-1980s.

## Warszawa

While before the war, the autonomous municipal authorities exerted decisive influence over matters relating to planning, after 1945 this function was usurped by the State. Two sweeping steps were taken in the first year after liberation by a newly established planning body called the Reconstruction Office for the Capital-City (BOS). One led to the nationalisation of property (*dekret komunalizacyjny*) within the pre-1951 city limits, the other demolition to ground-floor level of hundreds of burnt-out properties claimed to threaten public well-being that could have been restored or redesigned [Majewski and Markiewicz 1998: 14–15]. Despite this generally needless clearing of Warsaw's pre-war architecture, defined by one specialist as a successive, fifth stage of destruction after the Germans had gone [Sujecki 2005: 32], the years 1945–1948 prior to the Stalinist freeze descending were marked by a considerable amount of patching up of damaged, burnt-out or semi-demolished buildings. These steps reflected a concerted attempt by 'ordinary' Varsovians surviving the war to bring about a promise made in the 'hell' of the 1944 Uprising that those parts of Central Warsaw, where it was feasible to do so, must be restored to their (broadly defined) pre-war appearance. The drastic measures adopted by BOS without consulting with the returning citizens initially appeared to favour a modernist-orientated, *tabula rasa* approach to replanning the devastated urban landscape. Monopolisation of power, nonetheless, followed in December 1948 with the amalgamating of pro-Soviet political groupings into the United Polish Workers' Party (PZPR). A Stalinist, Socialist Realist model was then introduced through the Six Year Plan (1949–1955). The PZPR Central Committee (KC) housed itself in an awe-inspiring headquarters dwarfing the southern section of Nowy Świat. An entirely new government ministerial district went up in the vicinity delineated by Three Crosses' Square, Krucza and Żurawia Streets.

The BOS chief was R. Piotrowski, but the driving force behind its activities became J. Sigalin, a prominent figure in Warsaw's Urban-Planning Office (BUW) appointed the city's first Chief Architect in 1951. The importance of conservationists such as J. Zachwatowicz and art historians like J. Biegański in preparing a programme of restoration and reconstruction for the city was seriously undermined by the Party's patronage of ambitious yet inexperienced architects like Sigalin and his colleagues, S. Jankowski, J. Knothe and Z. Stępiński who formed the *La Scala* group. They foolhardily placed themselves under the tremendous pressure of playing the leading part in an effective reshaping of crucial parts of the city centre within a matter of six to seven years.

The course of Stalinist Warsaw's reconstruction under Bolesław Bierut (President in 1947–1952, then chief of governing state bodies until 1956)

originated from the *La Scala* group's success in winning approval of their plan for an East-West Thoroughfare (*Trasa W-Z*). Ceremonious unveiling of the *Trasa* on the fifth anniversary of the Lublin Committee (22nd July 1949) was preceded by declaration of the Sixth Year Plan that set in place the line to be taken in Warsaw's redevelopment (*przebudowa*) and selective reconstruction of historic monuments (*odbudowa*). An 8km high-speed artery was laid out from Praga to working-class districts in Wola, Młynów and Koło by way of a grand new, two-lane Silesian-Dąbrowa (industrial basin) Bridge. A crucial section connecting the bridge with the crossroads of a northern extension of Marszałkowska Street towards Żoliborz caused a path of destruction, conducted from the semi-demolished Pancer Viaduct and tunnelled Royal Route through great swathes of war-damaged buildings, liquidating a vital part of the northern-central district and landscaping it. The Neoclassical architecture of Leszno Street, renamed General Świerczewski (currently Solidarności) Avenue, suffered similar treatment. Although major historic monuments on Castle Square and adjacent Krakowskie Przedmieście were restored, entire groups of historic buildings in comparable states of devastation had been condemned by the *La Scala* architects. The open cast construction of a tunnel beneath the Vistula escarpement caused irreparable destruction to invaluable mediaeval through to 18<sup>th</sup>-century architecture on Krakowskie Przedmieście, Senatorska and Miodowa Streets. The risky propaganda stunt of inserting a set of Moscow *metrostoi* escalators in the remains of the 17<sup>th</sup>-century John's House brought further disaster, followed by plain evidence either of the architects' ineptitude or extreme exhaustion [Martyn 2001: 193–229].

The adoption in Poland of Socialist Realism was a sudden and one-sided affair, unleashed under the cognitive guidance of *one* person: Edmund Goldzamt, a student on a state grant at the Moscow Institute of Architecture. He was brought to Warsaw by none other than Sigalin, who writes of referring to his new made friend as Edmundek. A lecture was given by Goldzamt at a two-day Party General Meeting on 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1949 to prepare the architects present for what was to come [Goldzamt 1956]. Bierut delivered his own lecture a fortnight later on the cruciality at a state level of industrialising the country and lending a representative quality to the city centre. Dead on time, the *Trasa W-Z* was opened on 22nd July, 1949 to mark the sixth anniversary of the Lublin Committee's foundation.

Architectural reconstruction combined with urban redevelopment meant that single projects were generally subordinated to planning issues. New construction was subject to the Socialist Realist tenets of 'national in form', 'socialist in content', also subjected to the interiors of a significant proportion of rebuilt historic edifices. In practice, 'historic' architecture was subsequently degraded to being an inseparable part of the city's simultaneous redevelopment.



Deprived of the dense structure of outbuildings, the Old Town's reconstruction and semi-restitution (in which *La Scala* did not take part) could not possibly evoke the ambience of its near obliterated, many centuries old pre-war predecessor. Incorporating the preserved walls of patrician houses, the Market Square was a determined piece of urban-architectural restitution, much as the town houses on intersecting side streets. Formal international acknowledgement came with inclusion on the UNESCO list of world cultural heritage (1984). Less invoking of the long lost past is the Old and New Towns' primary role in 'socialist' Warsaw as housing estates (cf.: ZWR Union of Workers' Housing Estates on Krakowkie Przedmieście [Leśniakowska 1998: 44–48], Nowy Świat, etc.). Sigalin was involved in enhancing the Old Town's remnant mediaeval defence walls with bricks apparently transported from towns in Silesia and Elbląg (Elbing) [Sigalin 1986: 331].

Little more than a pile of ruins, the Cracow Bishops' Palace was effectively reinvented to accord with Bernardo Bellotto's somewhat fanciful painting of c.1770, this also occurring with the Branickis' Palace opposite. The painter, falsely referred to as 'Canaletto', provided the architects of Socialist Realism with a readily-at-hand, suggestive insight into how they wished to perceive the city's architecture before its supposed disfigurement (*zszpecenie*) in the later-19th and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But conjuring up out of the ruins entire groups of 'historic monuments' on the basis of close to 200-year-old paintings was a reckless venture to follow up the gaffs connected with planning the *Trasa*. The tragedy of the matter is that precise accuracy had ceased to be a primary objective in PZPR-run Poland. An 'ideal' profile of wholly two-floors was stipulated by Stępiński in an article on rebuilding the Nowy Świat [Stępiński 1947: 59–73]. The 'reconstruction' transformed much of what had been left after the war. The year 1850 divided the architecturally correct from the architecturally censored. This explains the effective war on tenement housing since the BOS-led demolitions.

The *La Scala* Marszałkowska Housing District (MDM, 1953–1955) arose from Bierut's 'maxim' "workers' flats shall enter the city centre along the East-West Thoroughfare and Marszałkowska Street" [Bierut 1954]. The district it went up in had been extensively rehabilitated after the war. Modelling the blocks on J. Heurich's grand tenement house (*sic!*) (Małachowski Square 2) was praiseworthy, reflecting other architects' attempts to draw on historic styles in completely new post-war construction. But the gargantuan impact of forcing a Socialist-Realist urban implant on the patched-up built landscape of southern-central Warsaw's circuses and radiating boulevards was not. It effectively spelled the doom of socialist realism in Poland [Włodarczyk 1986: 94]. Urban architectural discussions on the 1949–1955 period alluded to a systemic sea change; much as Kruschchev had suggested

urban planning policy must change 16 months before his Secret Speech on 12th March 1956.

No account of Warsaw's history as chief city to the People's Republic could possibly overlook the Joseph Stalin Palace of Culture and Science (PKiN, 1956). Sigalin's vivid account leaves no doubts over the circumstances of its origins. Given 24 hours to decide on one of five sites, the *La Scala* gang of four opted for the worst one imaginable, defined by Chmielna, Marszałkowska, Świętokrzyska and a northern extension of Emilii Plater streets. More than a square kilometre of Central Warsaw was condemned to liquidation. No doubt recalling the Russian Orthodox Cathedral on Saxon (by then Victory) Square from his stay in 1913, chief architect L.V. Rudnev wanted to set the tower's height at 100–120 m. But the Poles knew better, settling at 150–160 m. [Sigalin 1986: 429].

## Minsk

A Stalinist, so-called wedding cake, palace was also intended to dominate the BSSR's chief city, in a plan conceived by A. Parusnikov with G. Badanov for Oktyabrskaya Square. The square itself replaced two former street blocks between Krasnoarmeyskaya, Internatsional'skaya and Engels Streets to link up with the grand new Prospekt Stalina (Stalin Avenue). One in a series of entry designs for the new main square's layout and surrounding edifices entered for the 1948 architectural competition, this particular concept was judged favourably but as requiring improvement. It was placed on hold. Delays ensued and with Stalin's death no-one was going to clear it for realisation. The wide open space, built-up on just half of one side by the Palace of Culture for the Trade Unions (L. Melegi, V. Ershov, 1954), became an embarrassment for the authorities [Zadorin 2018: 206–213].

In contrast, at some three times wider than the central road Governor Zakhary Korniyev had demarcated in 1801, Stalin Ave. (today's Independence Ave.) was a *tour de force* for the Soviet authorities, comprising a grandiose central section for a greatly prolonged single thoroughfare connecting the main highway from Warsaw to Moscow, as well as the airport, and an effective backbone for the unfolding million city.

Impressive if viewed from the Victory Circus and Svisloch bridge, Stalin Avenue lacks an appropriately grand approach from Lenin Square, dominated by equally monumental side elevations, rather than the frontages, of its first two grand edifices: the Minsk Hotel (G. Badanov, delayed until 1958) and 'Italianate neo-Baroque' Central Post Office (A. Duchan, U. Karol, 1953) of massive, four-story portico, two side wings and middle rotunda [Picarda 1994]. Most celebrated as a street ensemble, the 'Prospekt' features a series

of particularly noteworthy grand structures. The combined Ministries of Internal Affairs and State Security (1947, S. Gaydukevich, M. Parusnikov), had an ironically set back middle section, protruding grand portico and an octagonal tower, raised on an axis with two blocks of flats (1949, M. Parusnikov) at the crossroads of a widened, south-east section of Komsomolskaya St, complete with central grass reservation. GUM, the State Department Store (R. Gegart, L. Megert, 1951) is a chunky mass of *piano nobile* with added architectural decorative elements and gloriously Neoclassical interiors at the half-way-house crossroads with Lenin St. Remaining masses include those built to house a variety of ministries, including the State Bank (Parusnikov, 1952), combined City Soviet and Minsk Bearing Plant block of flats (G. Badanov, 1952), Head Telegraph Office (delayed, V. Karol, A. Durkan, 1962) fronting today's Central Square from the 'Propekt' and matching residential complexes of the Central Committee (M. Barshch, 1953) and further state ministries (M. Barshch, L. Aranauskas, 1957).

Two of the leading architects involved were clearly Parusnikov and Badanov, among numerous others who did not operate in the same architectural group as in the *La Scala* one. They were generally new and did not enjoy the degree of authority of Lavrov and Langbard. As D. Zadorin so lucidly puts it, Stalin Ave. was "stitched into a 19<sup>th</sup>-century urban" fabric: "Unlike elsewhere in the centre, where architects were directed to spare as much of what had been left as possible, here the ruins were subject to complete obliteration for the sake of creating an ideal Soviet street" [Zadorin 2018: 181]. Moreover, Klinau emphasises how the architectural programmes applied had no historical basis behind them. While at least to some degree the socialist-realist redeveloping of Central Warsaw did draw on Baroque and Neoclassical architectural traditions, Minsk was embellished in an Imperialist Stalinist vein:

In the City built as an overture to the City of the Sun, which was supposed to rise up not here but 700km to the east, there was no need to present a detailed main theme. It sufficed to suggest, sketch out and designate. After all, the City amounted to no more than a Gateway leading to the true City of Sun and, as a result, what could be made out by the traveller passing through this Triumphant Gateway. The other side of the decoration was of no significance whatsoever, which is why on the courtyard side the Palaces were not even plastered. At best, some smaller decorative elements were applied directly to the bare-brick walls [Klinau 2020: 127].

Moving into the street network north and south of today's Independence Ave., the primarily 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century architecture was supplemented with a number of generally less overbearing edifices, typically conceived by other architects than those involved on the 'main drag' of Stalin Ave.

The 'Byelorussian' Communist Party Headquarters (A.P. Voinov, 1947) proved in the end an exception to the case, in that its subsequent extension over the ensuing decades led to clearance of densely built-up street block of town houses behind the once free-standing front building. The Belarus Hotel (A. Voinov, A. Krylov, et al, 1940), Ministry of Agriculture (P. Ivanov, 1952), State Heating Company, now Belarusenergo, Offices (R. Gegart, 1955), 'Byelorussian' Communist Party Regional Committee Headquarters (A. Voinov, L. Usova, 1956) and splendid fusion of French with Soviet classicist frontage shielding a French Beaux-Arts iron-frame roof for the State Arts Museum (M. Baklanov, V. Belyankin, et al, 1957) are visually pleasing, if occasionally 'slightly overbearing' pre-, post- or fully blown Stalinist additions. The most active architect in these projects was clearly A. Voinov. An almost entire street profile pre-dating 1914 has survived on Revolutsionaya, most of Komsomolskaya and even Internatsionalnaya streets, as well as along greater or lesser parts of Valadarskoga, Engels, Karl Marks and Kirov streets [Picarda 1994].

All in all, the impression is of a more carefully prepared period of architectural design and stringently controlled urban planning that, by example, greatly delayed the final form for the Palace of the Republic on Central Square, which was not to be completed until the year 2001. This broadly perceived image is conjured up in a publicity film of under 15 minutes from 1954. The first view over the city proper is depicted from one of the two flanking towers (B. Rubanenko, L. Gobulovsky, et al, 1954), serving as a gateway to the city from the Railway Station. The narrator's gentle voice announces: *Dzien dobry, Minsk*. Beyond the aesthetic Horseshoe building and Kozina House (1890s) stretches a landscape of pre-war town houses and tenements intermingled with three- and four-storey, post-1921 and post-1945 architecture, the tops of building on loftier Stalin Ave., more distant buildings, trees and countryside. Of course, the myth must be drummed that the city centre had been reduced to a desert and ruins (*пустырь и руины*); a group of Stalingraders arrive to symbolically add two chalky looking, brick-shaped stones to the massive walls already built; a delegation of Chinese Communists is here to lament the ruination and marvel at the scale of re-building. But the propaganda is soft, the listener is spared figures and any allusion to bravado (not least, perhaps, because the Georgian gangster-tyrant was now dead), the onlooking workers are young and serious, innocent and optimistic. Moreover, the Belarusian language and culture are seen to be thriving. This image of a new era that, at least in the film and the way the common citizenry was depicted in it, appeared innocent and optimistic – in spite of all the inconsistencies of the system and its ruling elite. In it the fact is also emphasised that Belarusian language, literature and culture are thriving in the country's own capital city.

## The post-Stalinist decades

The years 1955–1975 for Warsaw and c.1960 well into the 1980s for Minsk transformed city life to something ironically echoing that in the West, with wider differences in the way people subsisted, the popularity of jazz and pop music, rising consumerism, mass culture, proportion of car owners in relation to everyone else and arrival of the jet age.

In Warsaw, the architects experienced little problem resorting back to modernist forms that had never quite been banished during the Stalinist years (e.g. the CDT Central Department Store, Z. Ihnatowicz, J. Romański 1948–1952). Consumerist requirements combined with the first signs on the city's projected skyline to readdress its dwarfing by the PKiN gave rise to the East Wall (*Ściana Wschodnia*) shopping passageway and housing estate along upper Marszałkowska (master plan: Z. Karpiński, 1969). On the other hand, *tabula rasa* planning led to clearance of town houses from the 1820s on Bagno Street, reappearing on the map as an access road to the first high-rise housing blocks in Warsaw. This was a mere foretaste of what was to come. Pre-fabricated housing estates usurped vital parts of the former city centre, while spreading out into inner districts and the greatly extended outer urban periphery. Only the economic crash induced by the stand off between the Party and Solidarność free trade unions ended this vastly stepped-up transformation of the city's built landscape.

In Minsk, as in Warsaw, a related process entailed of mass housing block construction from the mid-1960s to be prolonged a decade longer, before the USSR's severe economic downturn in the late-1980s decelerated the prolonged state-funded construction boom. Demolition in the centre, as part of the new road and housing construction, took its toll on the city's historic core. No reference had been made in the post-war Stalinist re-building to the old Minsk, one having come from the age of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (the Church of St Mary being vulgarly reshaped to fit in with a gigantic block off the Prospekt flanking Lenin St, by G. Zaborsky, 1954), the other Tsarist-Imperialist Russian. Prolonging Lenin St northwards over the Nemiga and non-existent Lower Town had already led to flattening the hill-ock and remnants of the 10th- /11th-century fortified township site. In the wake of a terrible flood surging into the underground conduit that carried the River Nemiga waters, the entire Nemiga quarter of 17th-century town houses down to early-20th-century tenements was then cleared down to the early-1980s, cutting off the Upper Town from its originally late-mediaeval Rakovski suburb, which underwent partial demolition.

## Conclusions

The circumstances behind the destruction and re-building of the two cities were remarkably close. Furthermore, Minsk had already been under Soviet control, hence the stakes were not nearly so high for the regime to stamp its presence on the built fabric there as in Warsaw, where the Soviet-installed Lublin Committee had to ensure its control over post-war Poland did not entirely depend on being propped up by the USSR. The chief method to reinforce control over Polish society was to turn Warsaw into its power base and urban model for the rest of the country. The Capital City that happened to be called Warsaw was subjected to having no more than selected aspects of the architectural past included on the planning board. Even actual reconstruction all too often came closer to re-building than genuinely restoring historic monuments. In Poland this approach was reflected in the re-construction of the mediaeval Old Town (*Stare Miasto*) districts, especially of Gdańsk, to a lesser extent Wrocław and Poznań and ruined town centres of Silesia. In Belarus methods tried and tested for Minsk were applied in the rebuilding and subsequent redevelopment of Vitebsk (Viciebsk, Witebsk) and Mogilov (Mohiliou-Mohylew), if to a lesser degree in Grodno (Horodnia). Condemning great swathes of the city's late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century topography to oblivion proved a specific obsession in post-war Poland. For the architects who got themselves involved in the shockingly destructive urban projects favoured by the regime, this obsession was based on a literal understanding of how to go about matters to suit the new system emanating from post-revolutionary Russia: not merely condemning the pre-1914 bourgeois world but actually destroying it. In Minsk, on the other hand, and indeed in most cities placed under Soviet administration, war-ruined or otherwise, this kind of zealous exaggeration was never to be practised on any great scale, yet – as has been seen – the Poles working for the PRL regime knew better. Central Moscow itself was largely spared the vast new projects planned for it from the 1920s onwards, in favour of such localised *gigantomania* as the Seven Sister pseudo-classical towers, to which Warsaw's PKiN became the eighth.

In Warsaw the central districts' brief episode of re-building was a truly immense undertaking that consumed a disproportionate part of the state budget. All over the country the wider population was engaged, whence the slogan: *Każdy obywatel buduje swoją stolicę*: (Every citizen is building his/her capital city). In the wake of wartime ruination-obliteration, it was reconstruction (*odbudowa*) and extensive redevelopment (*przebudowa*) that finally broke the pre-war metropolis's architectural diversity and unique urban texture. Ambiguity in the vocabulary applied to the city's re-building

from 1949 to 1956 well suited the propaganda of the time. The terms *odbudowa*, for re-building monuments of architecture, and *przebudowa*, for the city's simultaneous redevelopment, incessantly prevailed. More precise words like *rekonstrukcja* or *restoracja* tended to fade away, while no word exists, as such, for reconstitution: the ideal term for restoring buildings or street profiles to their pre-war state, so counterproductive for the Party. At the time, this ongoing transformation enjoyed popularity. Deeper reflection came only later [Cegielski 1968: 395]. In the context of restoring possessions or especially works of art seized by Nazi Germans from Warsaw Jews, a good point of initial reference might readily be the wartime fate of Viennese Jews.

And yet the authorities failed miserably to keep up with the dramatic demographic increase to 659,400 by 1956. From 1945 to 1949 about 139,000 rooms for habitation were overwhelmingly restored, whereas a shockingly meagre 126,000 were created under the Six-Year Plan (for the more than three-times enlarged city limits); compared to more than 301,000 new rooms in 1957–1965. Chronic housing shortage dogged the PRL to its bitter end.

Although the scale of rebuilding Minsk in the immediate post-war decade was in itself a daunting task, it was not subject to the extreme of grand ambitions and illusions that characterised the forging of Stalinist Warsaw. The population in 1959 stood at 509,500. One piece of propaganda did prove damaging to the city and how the majority of *Minczanie* came to understand their urban surroundings. This was the constant repetition about the city's 85% obliteration. Accompanied by selective film and photographs of the city in 1945, the state authorities' version of what had happened to the BSSR capital apparently left few of the new post-war citizens in doubt. When, however, Belarusian independence had been declared in 1991 and attempts were finally made to rekindle the city's historic heritage, this proved too remote to awaken (albeit immediately) wider public engagement: "... more than anything else, the citizens have held onto the notion, inculcated for decades, that the city was completely ruined during the war" [Zadorin 2008: 271]. The post-war myth fed initially by Stalinist propaganda, to be continued under successive party leaders and reiterated again, even decades later in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2014 edition, that the city suffered 85% obliteration had as yet come home to roost.

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**STRESZCZENIE:** Decydujące znaczenie w przypadku Warszawy i Mińska miał tzw. „epizod stalinowski” (1948/9–1955/6 w Warszawie; trwający od 1945 aż do końca lat 50. XX w. w sowieckim Mińsku), charakteryzujący się intensywnymi pracami budowlanymi w dzielnicach centralnych. W Warszawie było to niedługie, lecz bardzo dotkliwe siedmioletnie, ściśle splecione z powstaniem PRL. W ten sposób położono podwaliny pod tak zwaną stolicę socjalistyczną, która zaznaczyła się jako okres „komunalizacji” majątku, działalności zagorzałych architektów cieszących się przychylnością Partii oraz burzenia wypalonych ruin wielu gotowych do odrestaurowania budynków – przede wszystkim kamienic czynszowych z piętnowanej epoki „burżuazyjno-kapitalistycznej” z ok. 1850–1914. Odbudowa w stolicy BSRR wciąż cieszy się dużym uznaniem ze względu na przekształcenie jej w ponadmilionowe miasto. Zatarła w swym dawnym biegu główna ulica nabrała charakteru wizytówki miasta w postaci alei Stalina (obecnie Niepodległości); ulice Lenina, Engelsa, Karola Marksa oraz kolejne centralne aleje komunikacyjne przeszły częściową przebudowę. Podczas gdy kluczowe zabytki zostały zburzone, wciąż wyróżniająca się architektura z ok. 1850–1914 była zazwyczaj poddawana renowacji i nierzadko podwyższana lub dostosowana do estetyki stalinowskiej. „Historyczny Mińsk” zaczął być wymyślany na nowo, z czasem starannie odbudowany dopiero po 1991 r. W podsumowaniu autor nawiązuje do przedwojennego charakteru architektoniczno-przestrzennego Warszawy i Mińska, ich zniszczeń w trakcie drugiej wojny światowej oraz dalszych faz przebudowy, dokonywanych po kluczowym „epizodzie” stalinowskim, który zdecydował o istotnych cechach architektury miejskiej i układu przestrzennego wprowadzonego po 1945 r.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** miejskość, architektura, odbudowa, rekonstrukcja, przebudowa miast.



**АНАТАЦЫЯ:** Вырашальнае значэнне для Варшавы і Мінска мела г. зв. “сталінская эпоха” (1948/9–1955/6 у Варшаве; у савецкім Мінску – з 1945 да канца 1950-х), якая характарызувалася інтэнсіўнай забудовай цэнтральных раёнаў. У Варшаве гэта былі кароткія, але вельмі пакутлівыя сем гадоў, цесна пераплеценыя з узнікненнем Польскай Народнай Рэспублікі. Так быў закладзены падмурак для г. зв. сацыялістычнае сталіцы, якая характарызувалася “камуналізацыяй” маёмасці, дзейнасцю руплівых архітэктараў, якія карысталіся прыхільнасцю партыі, а таксама зносам руінаў многіх будынкаў, якія можна было рэстаўраваць – прынамсі, камяніцаў “буржуазна-капіталістычнай” эпохі 1850–1914 гг. Рэканструкцыя ў сталіцы БССР і сёння карыстаецца вялікім прызнаннем у сувязі з яе ператварэннем у мільённы горад. Безаблічная раней, галоўная вуліца набыла характар візітоўкі горада ў выглядзе праспекта Сталіна (цяпер праспект Незалежнасці); часткова рэканструяваны вуліцы Леніна, Энгельса, Карла Маркса і іншыя цэнтральныя камунікацыйныя праспекты. У той час як ключавыя помнікі былі знесены, усё яшчэ адметная архітэктура з 1850–1914 гадоў звычайна рэканструявалася і часта адаптавалася да сталінскай эстэтыкі. “Гістарычны Мінск” пачаў выдумляцца нанова, старанна адбудовацца толькі пасля 1991 г. У падсумаванні аўтар звяртаецца да даваеннага архітэктурна-прасторавага характару Варшавы і Мінска, іх разбурэння падчас Другой сусветнай вайны, а таксама наступных этапаў рэканструкцыі пасля ключавога “сталінскае эпохі”, якая вызначыла істотныя рысы гарадской архітэктуры і прасторавай планіроўкі, уведзеных пасля 1945 г.

**КЛЮЧАВЫЯ СЛОВЫ:** горадабудаўніцтва, архітэктура, будоўля нанова, рэканструкцыя, адраджэнне гарадоў.

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