

POST-WWII RUINS ON PHOTOGRAPHY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY OF POZNAŃ. CASE STUDY OLD TOWN

Adam NADOLNY^{*,1}, Katarzyna SŁUCHOCKA¹

¹ Faculty of Architecture, Poznan University of Technology, 60-965 Poznan, Poland

Abstract

The aftermath of World War II (WWII) left numerous European cities devastated, necessitating extensive reconstruction efforts to restore their urban fabric. The city of Poznań, located in western Poland, was no exception, as it bore witness to widespread destruction during the war. In this abstract, we delve into the role of photography in documenting the ruins of Poznań after WWII and how these visual records have contributed to the city's subsequent reconstruction. This research explores the visual representations of post-war ruins in Poznań through the lens of documentary photography. By examining archival photographs, contemporary accounts, and historical narratives, we aim to analyse the significance of these images in understanding the extent of the destruction and the subsequent efforts to rebuild the city. The abstract highlights the inherent power of photography to capture the raw reality of urban devastation, conveying the magnitude of the challenges faced by the city's inhabitants in the aftermath of war. Furthermore, it sheds light on the ways in which photographic documentation played a crucial role in informing reconstruction initiatives, acting as a visual guide for architects, urban planners and policymakers. Drawing from the rich visual archive of post-war Poznań, this study showcases how photographs served as a valuable resource for documenting architectural losses, mapping destroyed areas and preserving cultural heritage. By juxtaposing historical photographs with contemporary images, we examine how the city's landscape has evolved over time, tracing the progression from ruins to reconstruction.

Keywords: Ruins; Context; Archival photography, Reconstruction, Cultural Heritage

Introduction

Photography played a pivotal role in the post-World War II reconstruction of cities devastated by the war. As nations emerged from the darkness of conflict and set out on the arduous task of reconstruction, photography served as a powerful medium to document the extent of destruction, preserve historical memory, and inspire hope for a brighter future. From documenting war-torn landscapes and ruined urban centres to capturing the progress and transformation during the reconstruction, photographs played an essential role in shaping public perception, mobilizing support, and informing decision-making processes.

The end of World War II marked the beginning of a transformative era, both for photography and the cities in need of revival. Photographers, many of whom had experienced

* Corresponding author: adam.nadolny@put.poznan.pl

the war firsthand as soldiers or civilians, turned their lenses toward the remnants of once-great urban centres. They documented the twisted metal and crumbled facades, creating visual records of the immense destruction that war had brought.

Photographs became a way for the world to bear witness to the magnitude of the devastation. Images of bombed-out streets, broken bridges and shattered landmarks served as powerful testimony to the cost of conflict. These photographs were shared globally, awakening empathy and galvanizing support for the cities in need (Figs. 1 and 2).



Fig. 1. The ruins of City Hall in Poznań after war damage in 1945
[<https://cyryl.poznan.pl>]



Fig. 2. Aerial photo of Old Market and part of the Old Town during occupation, 1940s.
[<https://cyryl.poznan.pl>]

Cities ravaged by war faced a dilemma: how to rebuild while preserving their cultural heritage. Photography played a crucial role in this regard, as it allowed planners and architects to document historic buildings and landmarks before they were lost forever. These visual records provided a blueprint for reconstruction efforts that aimed to faithfully recreate the past. For instance, Poznan, Poland, which suffered extensive damage during the war, turned to pre-war photographs and architectural plans to guide the meticulous reconstruction of its historic Old Town. These images served as a beacon of hope, illustrating that the city's vibrant past could rise from the ashes (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The decayed roofs of Poznan's Old Town, seen from the west, late 1940's
[<https://cyryl.poznan.pl>]

Photography not only documented the past but also informed future urban planning. As cities sought to rebuild and modernize, photographs played a pivotal role in showcasing innovative architectural designs and urban development projects. By capturing the potential of these new visions, photographers helped to inspire optimism and a sense of progress. One striking example is the reconstruction of Hiroshima, Japan, after the atomic bombing. Photographers documented the city's transformation into a symbol of peace and resilience. Through their images, the world witnessed the emergence of a new Hiroshima, one that blended modernity with a commitment to never forget the horrors of war.

History has an undeniable allure, and nowhere is this more evident than in the restoration of old cities. Among these cities, Poznan stands as a testament to the dedication and artistry of those who seek to breathe life back into the past. Situated in western Poland, Poznan boasts a rich history that stretches back over a millennium, and its old city, with its cobbled streets,

ancient architecture, and vibrant culture, has long been a source of fascination for historians and enthusiasts alike.

The reconstruction of Poznan's old city is a labour of love, a journey through time captured in remarkable detail through the lens of photography. As the city's architects, historians, and preservationists work tirelessly to restore its historical heart, photographers have played an integral role in documenting this transformative process. Their images not only showcase the architectural feats and meticulous craftsmanship involved but also convey the essence of Poznan's old city – its resilience, enduring beauty and ability to bridge the gap between past and present.

Taking into account the relevance of the topic of photography of ruins and reconstruction the authors worked out the base sources in the following directions works devoted to the architectural and urban development problems of Poznań in different periods – articles by A. Nadolny *et al.* [1], A. Nadolny [2], J. Skuratowicz [3], G. Kodym-Kozaczko [4], Z. Ostrowska-Kęłbłowska [5], J. Toposki [6], H. Grzeszczuk-Brendel [7, 8], K. Słuchocka *et al.* [9] and research articles devoted to photography, K. Havik and A. Sioli [10], C. Zimmerman [11] and T. Lichtenstein [12]. It also includes issues directly related to methods and analysis of heritage in architecture as visible in publications by: M. Orlenko *et al.* [13], J. Kobylarczyk *et al.* [14], D. Kuśnierz-Krupa *et al.* [15], V.A. Nikolaenko [16], as well as issues directly related to memory in architecture and ruins by J. Hill [17] and A. Forty [18].

The analysis of the base sources proved that the problem of ruins and photography is international and the world has accumulated a powerful positive experience of repurposing. The relationship between ruins and photography is a fascinating and complex one, often explored in the realms of art, history and cultural studies. Photographs of ruins can serve various purposes, from documenting architectural decay to capturing the romantic allure of the past.

The primary aim of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the historical phases that illustrate the correlation between ruins and the evolution of reconstruction of old town city of Poznan. By examining the intricate relationship between the architectural remnants of the past and the various historical periods they represent, this research seeks to shed light on how ruins serve as tangible witnesses to the rise and fall of societies, the progression of architectural styles, and the cultural shifts that have shaped our world.

Finally, this study endeavours to contribute valuable insights into the role of ruins as windows to the past, offering a richer comprehension of the continuous dialogue between history and the physical remnants it leaves behind. The tasks of the research were as follows: to analyse the development of and reconstruction processes of Poznań after WWII, consider the aspect of memory in architecture and ways of its expression, propose steps for the preservation of the integral historical environment, the "memory of the place," on the basis of the integral historical environment as well as to determine the next stages of reconstruction based on an analysis of the historical context, urban features and global experience.

Materials and Methods

After Cracow and Warsaw, Poznan (location 1253) is one of Poland's oldest municipal centres. Its spatial arrangement was designed in accordance with the assumptions that were common in European towns throughout the Middle Ages, namely a centric city model with a market square and a network of surrounding streets. In the nineteenth century, the city was surrounded by defence structures and a fortification system. The defence walls were demolished in the beginning of the twentieth century, and the city entered a new phase of development.

bounds were of the same area, i.e. 637m², but with a different shape comparable to a highly extended rectangle. Of course, the shape of the walled town changed and was adjusted during its construction. As a result, it is expected that the average size of a building lot in mediaeval Poznan was between 638 and 838m² (Fig. 5).

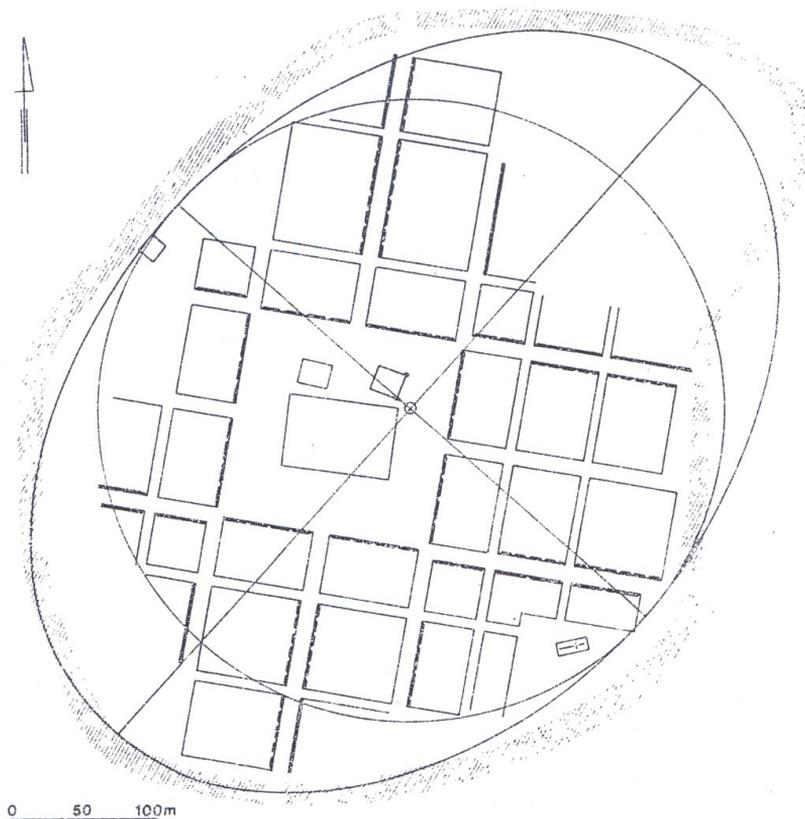


Fig. 5. A model of the city layout within the walls, with the pillory as the centre point, bonding the spatial structure of mediaeval Poznań
 [Topolski Jerzy: *Dzieje Poznania* (The History of Poznań),
 vol. 1, PWN, Warsaw - Poznań, 1988, page 207]

The city was ringed by embankments. Wroniec and Wrocaw gates on the north-south axis, and Wielka and Wodna gates on the east-west axis, were added to the defence system. Construction of the original town hall, along with the merchant's stores, began in the mid-13th century. The merchants' shops followed the trend of other mediaeval European cities (form similar to a rectangle, holding approximately 160 merchants' stalls), but the town hall and town scales were built at an angle to the market frontage. Because of the placement of the key city structures, the yard in front of the square was trapezoidal, and the pillory (mediastinum) was added to it as a place of punishment (Fig. 6). Poznań was given staples in 1394, which boosted the economic prosperity and the city's position.

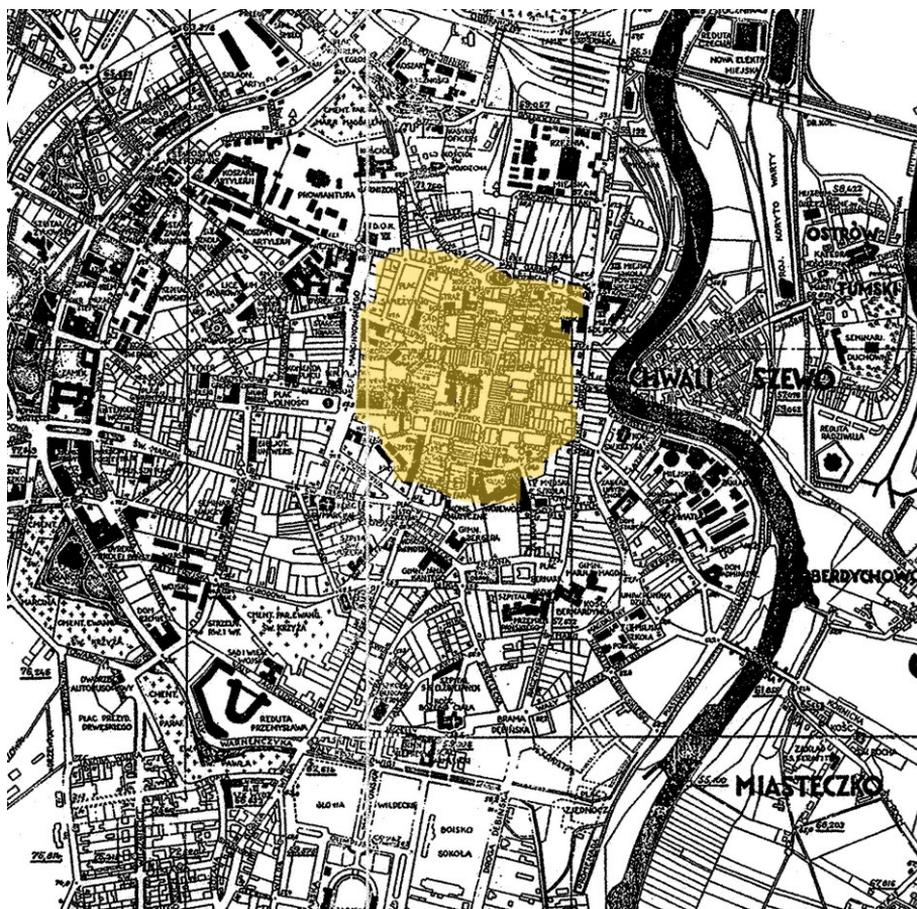


Fig. 6. The area of the old town in Poznań, on the map of the city from 1933

The period of post-war reconstruction from 1945 to 1968

The Red Army liberated Poznań in February 1945 at a high cost in terms of urban development. The downtown area, which is located on the east side of the major railway station, as well as the Old Town, experienced significant losses. Many Polish cities, including Poznań, began post-war rehabilitation by mending municipal infrastructure and restarting industrial output. Housing was ranked lower in importance. Residential buildings were reconstructed after 1946, by both private investors and the state. According to the research of source documents, the early focus was mostly on rebuilding the city after the damage of war.

In the case of the mediaeval town, which was devastated in 60% of its original size, numerous reconstruction ideas were examined. During the early years following the war, Polish conservators' ideas revolved around two major theories of rehabilitation and reconstruction of destroyed historical cities. The first design, championed by Antoni Karczewski (1898-1957), believed that the old city would be reconstructed with a resemblance to the historical pattern but with structures that were unique in their architectural expression. Jan Zachwatowicz's (1900-1983) other notion postulated the reconstruction of old cities in their historical form, both in terms of urban planning and architecture. In this scenario, historical maps, blueprints, and photographs would be useful. This technology was utilised, among others, to rebuild Warsaw's Old Town and partly Poznań as well (Fig. 7).

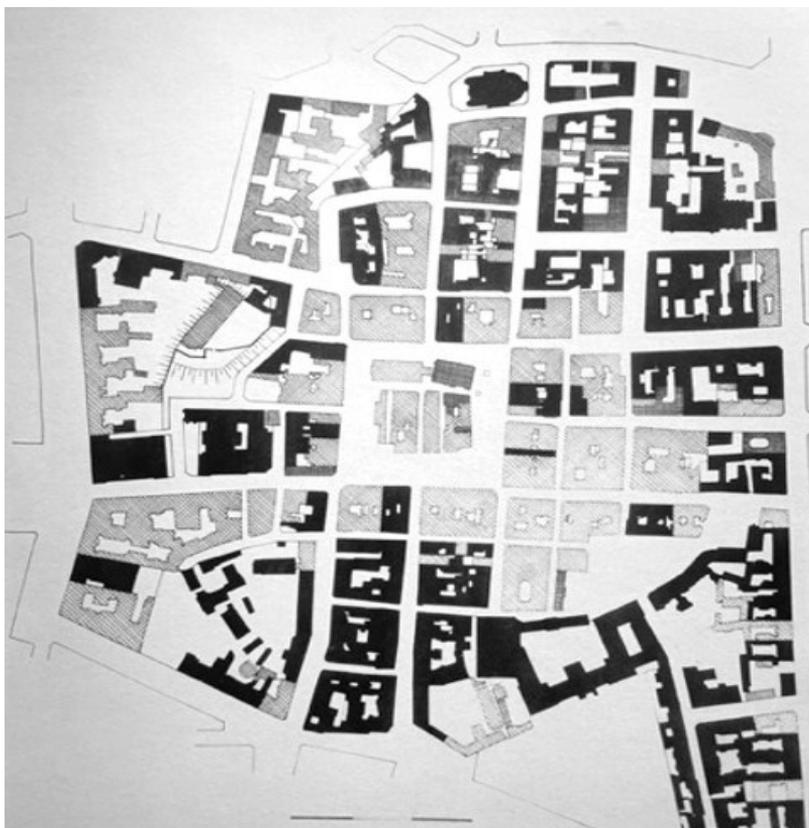


Fig. 7. A map showing the destruction of the war and ruined buildings in the area of the old town of Poznań, the preserved objects are marked in black.

Grayscale gradation shows the percentage of damage.

Black signifies destruction up to 20%, grey destruction 20-50%,

black grid - destruction over 50%.

[<https://cyryl.poznan.pl>]

The two aforementioned conservator principles were combined in the instance of Poznań's old town. The mediaeval layout of the city quarters was reconstructed in a uniform style reminiscent of the past. It was determined to restore the original height of the buildings that constitute the main square facing. It was also determined to restore the ancient allocation, particularly in quarters next to the market, which had been obliterated as a result of alterations and rebuilding, particularly in the nineteenth century. In numerous places of the Old Town, extensive archaeological study was conducted. It allowed the authors of this article to determine the shape of old mediaeval walls and learn more about the original urban development scheme.

The former mediaeval merchants' stores in the market square were reconstructed in such a way that the layout of mediaeval divisions was kept, but the rebuilt facilities were contemporary - modern in nature. Poznań has gone through several stages in its almost thousand-year history. The mediaeval spatial structure preserved downtown is one of the most enduring relics of the city's history. Despite several spatial alterations and city development approaches, the mediaeval centre's urban structure is still discernible. A historian of architecture should remark that, despite the losses incurred during World War II, it was feasible to preserve the shape of the past for posterity. Mediaeval urban planning has left a larger imprint on the city's history than many political or military actions (Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. Wielka Street in Poznań destroyed as a result of WW II
[<https://cyryl.poznan.pl>]

Ruins and the evolution of reconstruction of old town city of Poznań after 1945

The ruins of the destroyed old town in Poznań could have become a natural monument commemorating the period of WW II, as was in the case with parts of Hiroshima. However, as mentioned in the previous considerations, this idea was abandoned. It can be said that the ruined city centre became the basis for carrying out numerous archaeological works that would not have been possible in normal reality. The destroyed city has been revealing its centuries-old secrets to researchers since the second half of the 1940s.

The two concepts for the reconstruction of the Old Town complex mentioned in the earlier part of the text completed the creation of a new spatial framework for development in this part of the city. The photographs presented in this text from the period before and during the reconstruction clearly show the process of changes in which the ruins became buildings again.

The ruined old town also became an experimental field, where attempts were made to restore it to the scale and form of the late 18th century. This state of affairs was dictated by the approach of the then conservators to the legacy of the 19th century city. Poznań, like many European cities during the industrial revolution, underwent significant changes. Much lower buildings from the end of the 19th century were replaced by taller buildings, with dimensions different from those of the historical conditions. Changes in the area of the old town also included combining medieval building plots into larger ones. An example of this would be the development of tenement houses at numbers 73 and 74 on the western side of the market square (fig. 9). In 1908, in their place (tenement houses no. 73 and 74), architect Roger Sławski built an impressive building of the Industrial Bank (Fig. 10).

, which significantly changed the appearance of the market square facade and, at the same time, disturbed the proportions of the urban interior. An attempt was made to return to the historical arrangement of the facades of the tenement houses in the market square, as shown in the photo below. Of course, from the point of view of modern times, such an action was undoubtedly an attempt to return to the past, but it also contributed to the destruction of a public facility that was interesting from the point of view of the history of architecture. This approach to development was common in Poland at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. It was only in the 1970s and 20th century that the approach to this issue changed.

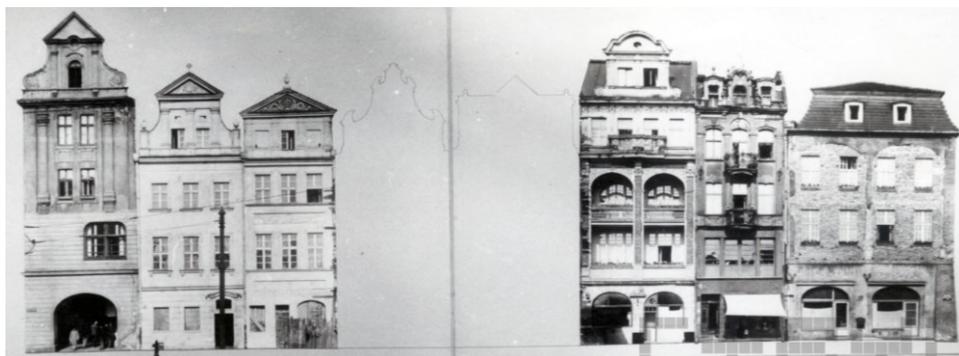


Fig. 9. Outline of the façade of the reconstructed tenement houses no. 73 and 74 incorporated into the western frontage of the Old Market Square between Paderewski and Franciszkańska street, before 1950
[<https://cyryl.poznan.pl>]



Fig. 10. Tenement house no. 73/74 on the western frontage of the Old Market Square destroyed during the war - the former headquarters of the Bank of Industrialists, built according to the design of Roger Sławski after the demolition of two tenement houses in 1908
[<https://cyryl.poznan.pl>]

In a similar spirit of transforming ruins into architecture, "repair" actions were taken in the case of the tenement house at numbers 71/72 (Fig. 11). The characteristic 19th century costume of the city's department store was replaced by two tenement houses, with a form and

dimensions referring to the scale of the city of Poznań from the end of the 18th century. As mentioned in these considerations, this approach to replacing the ruins with, in a sense, "artificial history" was highly promoted at that time. It was also about removing 150 years of German architectural influence on the city, which could not be introduced between 1918 and 1939.



Fig. 11. Tenement house no. 70 (on the left) and tenement house no. 71/72 destroyed during the war on the western frontage of the Old Market Square, on the left the exit of Paderewski Street
[<https://cyryl.poznan.pl>]

Results and Discussion

Mapping space using photography has become a record of the past. The ruins became a record of warfare and violence that took place over the war period. In the eyes of the architects, conservators and archaeologists of that time, the ruined city became an amazing testing ground where they could test new ideas. From the point of view and definition of history, it was a time of creative exploration. The titular ruins have become a cause for discussion about the shape of the modern city. A city where history could have changed course due to the destruction.

It should also be remembered that the ruins became a turning point in the search for the city's spatial identity, seen through the prism of the ideology of that time. At the beginning, they were used for propaganda purposes. Photography in a wonderful way allowed for quick diagnosis and recording of the present, taking into account the devastating narrative of the war.

The photographs selected for the purposes of this text show only a small part of the process of rebuilding and reconstructing the city destroyed as a result of the war. The titular ruins became a contribution to the search for a new socialist vision of the city. Free from the historical conditions that shaped it after Poznań was incorporated into Germany at the end of the 18th century. Today, we could treat the mentioned process of changes as an introduction to the discussion of what the titular ruin actually means in the broadly understood architectural discourse. As a summary of this part of the considerations, a quote of the words of Jonathan

Hill seems to be adequate, as he concludes the issue of ruin in architecture in the following way: „As a ruin, architecture is more not less. As a stimulus to the imagination, a ruin’s incomplete and broken forms expand architecture’s allegorical and metaphorical potential.

Emphasising that meanings are not fixed but open to adaptation and reinvention, a fragmented composition is a truer reflection of a contemporary society than a complete composition, indicating that a work of architecture, art or literature can remain unfinished, literally and in the imagination, focusing attention on the creativity of viewers, readers and users, and artists, writers and architects. Indicative of continuity as well as change, a ruin is both timeless and timeful.

As a means to contemplate time, a ruin is an image of the future as well as the past, encouraging us to imagine not only what is lost, but also what is yet to occur. Often a precursor to change, a ruin offers a recollection of the old and a promise of the new. Rather than confined to the past, the ideas and forms discovered in a ruin can be seen as incomplete and thus ready to be revived, enriched and expanded in the present. Ruins are like building sites, full of potential”.

Conclusions

The importance of ruins and photography in the post-war reconstruction of the old town in Poznań can be divided into several stages. The first of the diaries dates back to the period from 1945 to 1948, in which photography becomes only a tool for documenting the destruction resulting from war operations. In a sense, we can talk about the poetics of ruins. The next stage takes place in the years 1948-1956, this is the time of reconstruction of the Old Town. On the one hand, photography becomes a tool for documenting changes, but it is still a strong point in the discussion of the direction in which the reconstruction is heading. The ruins disappear and a city is built, but at the same time, changes and the ideology accompanying them destroy some elements of the past that do not fit into the new socialist world.

The perception of ruins at that time was related to an attempt to remember the past and a certain desire to create a new, more rational world of architecture, without ruins. Also, the proposed functional program for the rebuilt old town was not supposed to have negative connotations. It was supposed to be a space for artists and tourists, architects and other freelancers.

The correlation between modernity and tradition is very clearly visible in the examples provided in the text. The combination of photographs of ruins and the history of the rebuilt city is undoubtedly an element of the phenomenon of memory, strongly rooted in Western civilization, which Adrian Forty describes in the following way: „The Western tradition of memory since the Renaissance has been founded upon an assumption that material objects, whether natural or artificial, can act as analogies of human memory [...]. It would appear that this Western tradition owes a great deal to the concept of memory put forward by Aristotle, according to whom memory ‘is like the imprint or drawing in us of things felt’; in this scheme, forgetting is the decay of the imprint [17].

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