The City as a Witness of Social and Political Changes. Analysis of Post-war Reconstruction of Minsk as a Soviet Urban Model

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In contemporary urban studies, the physical reconstruction of cities is achieving a new dimension, which is reflected in the urban resilience that is expressed as the physical, social, cultural and economic capability of urban structures to respond to anthropogenic or natural catastrophes. In this paper, we study the reconstruction processes of Minsk, Belarus, which was almost completely destroyed and rebuilt as a new city after World War II, in order to understand in which way specific social and political conditions may have influence on the physical rebuilding of urban and architectural form in "devastated" cities. We based our analysis on study of Master Plans from different periods. In particular, we focused on the Master Plan 1946 analysing its specific characteristic and linking them to political and social circumstances of post-war period. We conclude that Minsk was reconstructed as a model for a new Soviet city that brings us to a question: could the Soviet architecture and urbanism fill the void in Minsk's urban heritage?

Keywords: devastation; reconstruction strategies; Minsk; Soviet urban model; Soviet urban heritage.

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Political dimension of urban reconstruction

Devastated cities do not only forfeit their urban structure but also may risk their identity, urban history and collective memory. Regardless of the reasons for devastation, one cannot assume reconstruction is exclusively a recovery of physical structure. Due to the demolition of urban and architectural components, social and cultural aspects lose their physical base, which gives them a scenario to be expressed within and helps them obtain their material form. Thus, the level of urban resilience has a significant weight in the reconstruction process and influences the further development and functioning of cities, which have suffered catastrophes. According to Kates and Pijawaka (1977, pp. 2-3):

> Disaster recovery can be divided into four overlapping periods.
>
> The emergency period is the time in which the community copes with problems caused by the extent of the destruction and the number of dead, injured, homeless and missing. Normal social and economic activities are disrupted […].
>
> The restoration period is marked by the patching up of public utilities, housing, commercial and industrial structures which can be restored, and return to relatively normal social and economic activities […].
>
> During the replacement reconstruction period, the city's capital stock is rebuilt to pre-disaster levels, and social and economic activities return to pre-disaster levels or higher […].
>
> The commemorative, betterment and developmental reconstruction period serves three different, but possibly interrelated functions: to memorialize or commemorate the disaster; to mark the city's post-disaster betterment or improvement; or to serve its future growth and development.

While the first two periods can be characterised as a necessary reaction towards the disaster (war or natural hazard destruction), the third and fourth periods are connected with political and social issues. In other words, the last two periods involve deciding what can be forgotten and what should be recovered. In his PhD thesis Carlos Itriago Pels[1] (2006, p. 60) speaks about the reconstruction period referencing the selectiveness of the post-disaster rebuilding process:

> […] to voluntarily remember or forget, brings us to a field that we call creative memory, which is characterized by the process of selection in a project at the time, which, in turn, leads to old discussions about what needs to be remembered, and therefore what should be forgotten[2].

According to this definition, the reconstruction program does not only propose a simple rebuilding of the former urban structure, but rather undergoes a complex process of selection, which is guided by the political forces at the time. Nevertheless, society also plays an important role in the selection of a reconstruction strategy. As Itriago Pels says: 'after a tragedy a principal need for local communities is to come back to a normal life' (2006, p. 40), which means that the main social and, sometimes even physical needs, are not satisfied (the period of emergency response). The social tension puts political leaders in a challenging

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[1] Independent architect and planner, invited lector at the Graduate School of Design of Harvard University (April, 2011); Department of Landscape Architecture in the Design School of the University of Pennsylvania (April, 2011); the Official Association of Architects of Murcia (November 2011); the Department of Urban and Regional Planning in the Polytechnic University of Catalonia and the UPC Foundation (since 2007).
[2] All non-English quoted texts are translated by the author.

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situation, in which their 'response to an acute crisis' (Vale & Campanella 2005, p. 340) is evaluated by citizens. As Itriago Pels states: 'such events as wars, anthropogenic or natural catastrophes can be significant catalyst for political changes' (2006, p. 37). On the other hand, an appropriate selection of the reconstruction strategy may not only help to rebuild an urban structure and recover the identity of a place, but even cause regional reorganization and a rise in national pride (e.g. Warsaw reconstruction)[3].

In spite of the involvement of all crucial urban aspects (political, economic, social and cultural) into a recovery process, in most cases political regimes play an essential role in the selection and application of a certain reconstructive strategy (ibidem). Independently of their aims, political leaders take responsibility to decide what should be preserved/restored/reconstructed or demolished and built from scratch[4]. Returning to Carlos Itriago Pels' thesis, there are three types of reconstruction strategies (ibidem, p. 57):

> [...] those which aim to be faithful to the legacy of the past (self-referential); those at the opposite end of the spectrum, taking advantage of the destruction to rethink a new city different to its past (refounding) and those strategies which seek a compromise between the obtained inheritance and the desired modernization (emancipatory).

The selection of one regeneration strategy or another depends on the political situation and regime, economic and ideological interests and social influence on the decision making process. At the time, we are aware of the difficulty to relate a particular city to one or another recovery strategy, due to the complexity and local particularities of each place. Even in the case of the refounding strategy, some places, monuments or buildings can be restored from the past.

> It is exceedingly rare that a city is completely relocated in the post-disaster period […]. Buildings, streets, underground utilities, and all manner of social systems (organizations, neighbourhoods, groups, families) are usually patched up or created anew in the previous locale (Haas, Kates & Bowden 1977, xv).

Nevertheless, synthesizing the applied reconstruction methods may help define the recovering strategy and understand their influence on the post-disaster city. In the case of self-referential strategy, we are dealing with the truthful reproduction of a previous urban structure, which in case of successful results, permits to continue a temporarily interrupted urban history and erase a catastrophe from the collective memory. A good example of this strategy are Japanese cities, which during their history have been destroyed numerous times (principally because of natural disasters, except World War II destructions). 'The Japanese rebuilt their cities much the same as they were before (...) this intervention, instead of responding to post-disaster conditions, were often pared-down versions of pre-disaster concepts' (Vale & Campanella 2005, p. 213). Natural disasters, such as earthquakes, tsunami, typhoons, etc., forced the Japanese population to adapt their reconstruction techniques to the circumstances, which meant raising light constructions, which after a hazard could be easily cleared and reproduced in the same way. Nevertheless, it does not deal only with the truthful physical reproduction of the destroyed urban structure, but also refers to the collective memory recovering the spirit of the place. Furthermore, historically the

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[3] See the explanation of the Warsaw reconstruction process on page 4.
[4] In order to avoid confusion in the words definition we perform their meaning according to the Cambridge dictionary: (i) preservation – the act of keeping something the same or of preventing it from being damaged; (ii) restoration – the act or process of returning something to its earlier good condition or position; (iii) reconstruction – the process of building or creating something again that has been damaged or destroyed.

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reconstruction of Japanese cities was not guided by governance but rather was given to the hands of private sector, who was interested in the speedy reconstruction and functional recovery of their places of residence and recuperation of normal life (Ibidem.). This shows the importance of the issue of who makes the decision on which reconstruction strategy should be applied, and for whom.

Talking about the re-founding strategy, we are referring to a situation in which the entire city structure is rebuilt without references to the previous urban organization. In this case, the devastation could be understood as an opportunity to not only construct a new urban structure but also a new society. As an example, we can mention China's Tangshan city, which after an earthquake in 1976, which destroyed almost 78 per cent industrial and 95 per cent residential buildings, was rebuilt as a new city. As a response to this horrible natural hazard, the Chinese Communist party rejected any foreign assistance and launched a recovery campaign driven by the idea that '...new and modern are always preferable to ideologically discredited past practices' (Vale & Campanella 2005, p. 348). Another example is Chicago's reconstruction after the 1871 Great Fire, which took advantage of the city's devastation in order to regenerate the urban structure according to the technical achievements (use of fireproof materials such as brick, stone, marble, and limestone, etc.). This led to the creation of the city's own Chicago's school of architecture, characterized by its streamlined style (Vale & Campanella 2005). Thus, in the case of Tangshan, the reconstruction policy was addressed to support the ideology of the ruling party via urban and architectural design, whereas in Chicago, the demolition of the previous structure made converting the city into an urban model possible.

The third strategy is the most common way to reconstruct damaged urban structures that is characterized by a selection process of what should be preserved and what could be demolished; what should be reconstructed and what could be forgotten. The phenomenon of creative memory, in most of cases has a strong connection with current political interests. For instance, in the case of Warsaw, recovery of the post-war city was controlled by the soviet authority, which decided what should be reconstructed according to its ideology (Vale & Campanella 2005). The Warsaw reconstruction illustrates how the political regime influences strategy selection utilizing urban and architectural reconstruction as a tool to reach certain ideological aims. Nevertheless, the predominance of political dimension in the process of urban reconstruction does not neglect the relevance of collective memory that has an important weight in the recovery of devastated cities. In the Warsaw case, the almost absolute destruction of the city's structure and intentions of the soviet administration to implement socialist urban ideas in order to construct 'politically correct architecture and urban design' (Vale & Campanella 2005, p. 137), did not stop the ambition of local communities to '…reinforce and recuperate the lost inheritance' (Itriago Pels 2006, p. 79). This led to a struggle between the 'new format of the city', promoted by the communist party, and recuperation of the old city that represented reestablishment of the national identity (Vale & Campanella 2005). Therefore, the Warsaw recovery process presents a combination of the refounding strategy (promoted by the soviet administration) and self-referential approach (defended by the local community). The Warsaw case presents the application of an emancipatory strategy, when the decision on what is restored and what is demolished depends on the political forces and demonstrates that its '… the spatial rebuilding is a critical political, rather than architectural, issue' (Ibídem. 2005, p. 137). It shows that, despite of the intention of the soviet authority to create a new city, completely forgetting big urban patterns (e.g. location of main streets, urban boundaries and natural systems) is not a simple task (Vale & Campanella 2005).

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Nevertheless, a comparative analysis of the pre-war urban structure of Minsk and a proposal for its reconstruction, demonstrates the possibility of (re)building the city in a different way. The study findings show that the post-war recovery of Minsk is related to the refounding strategy (which is not the most common way to rebuild the cities) making it an interesting case. A review of Minsk's reconstruction program after the II World War helps one understand the ideological circumstances that led to the construction of a completely new city and the reasons of an intentional omission of its previous urban structure.

Minsk as an example of the soviet urban model

Minsk is situated in the geographical centre of the country, it has an area of 348,85 sq. km and a population of 1.943.664 inhabitants; currently it is the capital of Belarus and the most important city in the country. Despite having a long urban history, a complex and well-designed city structure, the city of Minsk has not awoken a huge interest from urban point of view. Nevertheless, in this paper we present Minsk as one of the few studied cases of a dominant new Soviet city emerged after the II World War that deserves special attention in order to explain the Soviet (socialist) urban planning tendency.

Minsk had its maximum development in the post-war period that has reflected in the reconstruction of the almost devastated city embodied in the Master Plan of 1946. The current urban structure of Minsk is composed of three ring roads that define the urban zones by establishing a hierarchical order, which, in turn, depends on the location of the fragments from the city centre. At the same time, the continuous green system is configured by the natural fluvial urban corridors. The self-sufficient urban areas (mostly industrial parks and residential developments) are arranged in accordance with the concentric road system and green structures (Комитет архитектуры и градостроительства Минска 2010; see figure. 1).
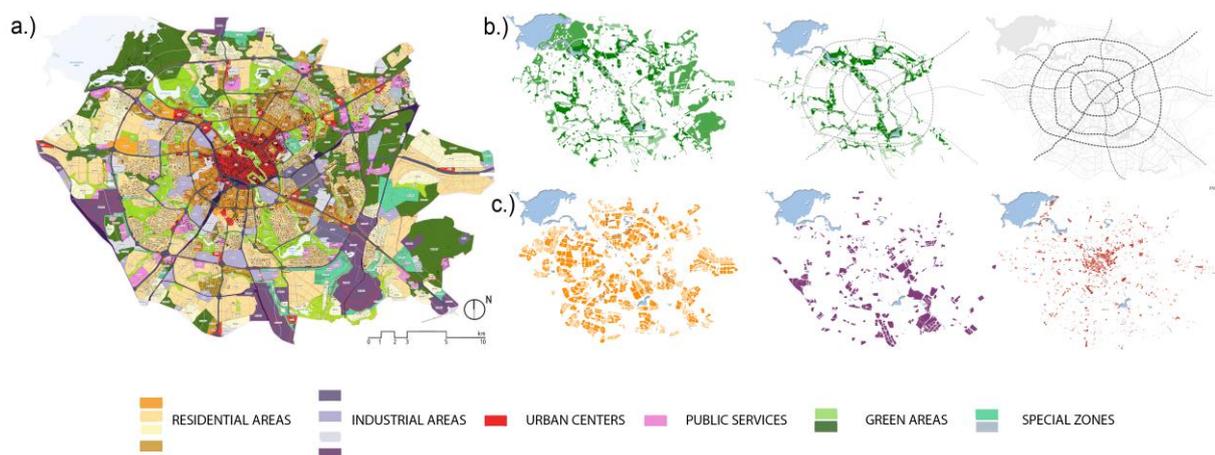

Figure 1. Current urban structure of Minsk: a.) Master Plan 2010; b.) lineal elements: road system and green corridors; c.) functional zoning: residential and industrial fragments and urban centres (Developed by the author on the basis of the Master Plan of Minsk (2010) available at the Institute of Urban Planning of Minsk).

Notwithstanding, the structure of the city has not always had the same character. For this reason, in order to understand the current city, it is necessary to study how this transformation occurred through the analysis of the instruments and processes, which led to

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it. After a brief introduction into the city's growth during the period prior to the II World War, this paper will focuses on the urban programs elaborated after that, which proposed the reconstruction of the city according to the concepts of the Soviet urban planning. Particularly, we will study the Master Plan of 1946, analysing its program and the elements, which radically changed the urban structure and aspect of the city between II World War and today. These elements converted Minsk into an illustrative example of Soviet urban planning, which is captured mostly in its contemporary identity.

Development prior to the II World War

The first notion of Minsk corresponds to the year 1067 in which, Nestor's Primary Chronical[5] described a battle at the Nemiga River after which, the city of Minsk was completely destroyed (Osmolovskiy 1952). Minsk's history begins with the reference to a conflict, which determined the destiny of the city: continuous destructions for reasons of war, trespassing from one country to another, subjugation to different governments and politics. Due to these circumstances, during the pre-war period, the city practically never played an important role, and its cultures and aspect was continuously changing (Klinov 2013). A brief introduction of the city's history will make the conditions under which Minsk was developed before II World War, clear.

By the time Minsk was mentioned for the first time, it found itself caught in a war between two powerful countries of the period: The Principality of Polotsk and the Kievan Rus that continuously fought for the city's control. In the XIII century, during the Mongolian Invasion of Russia[6], the city lost its importance in the development of Slavonic territories and disappeared from historical chronicles. The next mention of Minsk corresponds to its entry into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania[7], which caused an active growth in the city, such that in 1496, it received the Magdeburg rights and in 1565, became the administrative centre of the region. In 1569, due to weak exterior politics, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania arranged a union with the kingdom of Poland. This founded a new country, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth[8]. In this period, there was an intense growth and development within the city, which led to Minsk becoming the economic, cultural and religious centre in the middle of the XVII century. This period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth became the most important steps towards the urban, economic and cultural development of Minsk before the industrial revolution.

However, after a brief peace, a new wave of wars and conquers arrived, moving Minsk to the periphery of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Because of the political and economic

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[5] The Primary Chronicle (often translated into English as Tale of Bygone Years) is a history of Kievan Rus from about 850 to 1110, originally compiled in Kiev about 1113. The work is considered as a fundamental source in the interpretation of the history of the Eastern Slavs.

[6] The Mongol invasion of Russia began in the medieval Rus of Kiev, lasted from 1237 until 1240, precipitated the fragmentation of the principality and influenced the subsequent development of Russian history.

[7] The Grand Duchy of Lithuania was a European state from the 12th century until 1795. The duchy later expanded to include large portions of the former Kievan Rus and other Slavic lands, covering the territory of present-day Belarus, Latvia, and Lithuania, and parts of Estonia, Moldova, Poland, Russia, and Ukraine. At its greatest extent in the 15th century, it was the largest state in Europe. It was a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state with great diversity in languages, religion, and cultural heritage

[8] The Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Poland, Kingdom of Poland, after 1791 officially the Commonwealth of Poland, was a dualistic state, a bi-confederation, of Poland and Lithuania ruled by a common monarch, who was both the king of Poland and the grand duke of Lithuania. It was one of the largest and one of the most populous countries of 16th- and 17th-century Europe, with some 1,000,000 km^2 and a multi-ethnic population of 11 million at its peak in the early 17th century.

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crisis within the Commonwealth, the country was divided into the Russian empire and Prussia. It was then, in 1793, that Minsk was placed under Russia's control. From then until the establishment of socialism, the city was part of the Russian empire, developing as a peripheral city in which the only economic activity was artisanal production (Klinov 2013). According to the description of the city in Osmolovskiy's[9] book (1952) practically all buildings were made of wood, the urban structure had no clear character and the organization of urban elements was chaotic. Furthermore, the city did not have sewer or water channelling. There was no existing urban planning; therefore, as with many cities of this time, Minsk grew spontaneously depending on industrial and commercial development (Osmolovskiy 1952).

The Russian Revolution led to radical changes in all aspects of life. Urban and architectural practice also suffered revision and restructuring. In addition, important social changes occurred: if in 1897 Minsk had 97 thousand inhabitants, in 1922 the population grew to 102.375 inhabitants, in 1935 it reached about 200.000 and in June 1941 the city had around 300.000 inhabitants. This rapid growth can be explained by rural-urban migration due the industrialization process that led to the increment of the proletariat population. For instance, in 1928 Minsk had 5.000 industrial workers, whereas in 1935 this amount grew to the 20 thousand (Kurkou 2002).

The transformation of Minsk from the peripheral city to the important industrial region in the newly established soviet society is an important point in its urban development. Furthermore, it led to the selection of Minsk in 1921 as a capital of the new BSSR (Belarussian Soviet Socialist Republic) that recurred changes in its urban and architectural aspect (Babkou 2006). However, during the initial period of the establishment of the soviet government, the changes were specific and did not include cities' general structure. In Minsk's case, emblematic buildings[10] were built after the I World War and the restructuring of the city's road system (reorganization of the current urban structure based on orthogonal road network to a concentric system refers to rational and modernist urban concepts) was proposed. In 1926, a draft of the Master Plan was presented, which suggested restructuring the urban system of the city converting it into the concentric model. After this draft, in 1938, the Master Plan was developed and approved, in which emphasis was placed on the road system structure and segregation of the city into new urban zones, which would suit the needs at the time (Linevich 2010). In other words, the objective of Minsk's 1938 reorganization project was to adapt the city to the new soviet society through the establishment of a new urban organization based on modernist ideas and Soviet avant-garde. However, due to the weak economic situation of the Soviet Union, and the start of the II World War, the urban changes were only fulfilled in writing.

In conclusion, in spite of the continuous destructive cycles and the city's reconstruction, Minsk's urban evolution had a lineal and natural character in the pre-war period. That is, the city extended around its historical centre slowly obtaining a traditional urban structure, which represented a system of closed urban blocks configured by an orthogonal road system (figure. 2).

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[9] A Belarusian architect, which in early 50s issued two explicit books about Belarusian architecture and urban planning.
[10] See the Government Palace and the Theatre of Opera and Ballet of the architect Longbard, which until today play a significant role in the urban structure and ideology of the city.
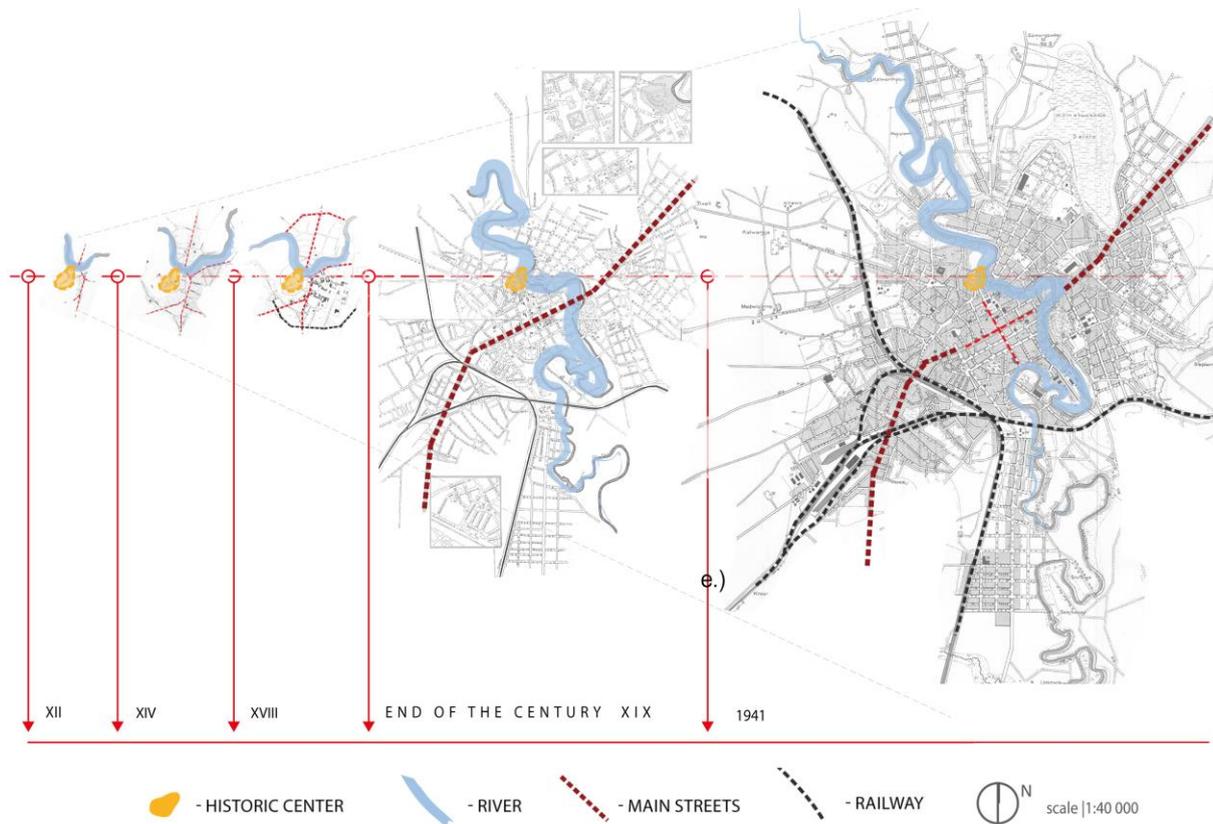
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Figure 2. Pre-war (World War II) urban development of the city, from the first mention in the chronicles (XIX c) to the 1941 (developed by the author on the basis of Osmolovskiy 1952).

Devastation during the II World War

During the II World War, many cities were seriously destroyed and in some cases completely devastated. One such case was the city of Minsk, ranked as one of the most devastated cities in Europe (Osmolovskiy 1952). The city suffered most of its destruction during the defensive battles against the German army that started on 25 of June 1941. Nevertheless, on the 28th of June 1941 the German army invaded the city, which led to the four-year occupation of the city's territories. Minsk's liberation by the soviet army started in 1943 and ended in 1944. After the liberation of Minsk, the city was a pile of ruins and rubble. Despite the destruction, because of the city's defence in 1941 during the occupation, there were numerous attacks and bombings in which 5975 residential buildings were destroyed, i.e. 70% of the housing stock, and 80% of the urban infrastructure (Osmolovskiy 1952). The population decreased by 80%. If Minsk had 250-300 thousand inhabitants the pre-war years, in 1944 only 40-50 thousand people survived (mostly because of the population massacre and concentration camps) (Babkou 2006; fig. 3). Destruction data show that the city needed urgent reconstruction. Thus, the work on a recovery plan for the city began. In the year 1944, the Commission for Architecture performed a study on the state of the city and the prospects for recovery. However, due to the numerous demolitions, the decision to build a new city, rather than rebuilding the existing one was made. Some even thought of moving Minsk a couple of miles away to not have to remove the debris of the city (application of the refounding strategy). Relying on the studies performed, and primarily considering ideological

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demands, a sketch master plan (1938), based on proposals made in the early years of the establishment of the Soviet Union, was written. In the sketch plan great intention was set on the construction of a representative city centre, and the following points were made (Linevich 2010):

- Rebuilding of the main pre-war artery of the city, into the main avenue of the post-war city;
- Building of a secondary road, perpendicular to the main avenue as the basic structure of the city centre;
- Building a new central square between the intersections of two main roads, creating a socio-political centre for the city;
- Building of two bypass arteries aimed at turning the city's structure into a concentric urban system;
- Creation of a continuous system of parks along the river Svisloch flood plain, which form a green diameter of the city.

The government approved the project as the starting point for Minsk's reconstruction. In summary, in 1946, a new Master Plan was presented which dramatically transformed Minsk's entire urban structure. The city shifted from having an orthogonal organization into a city with a concentric urban structure.
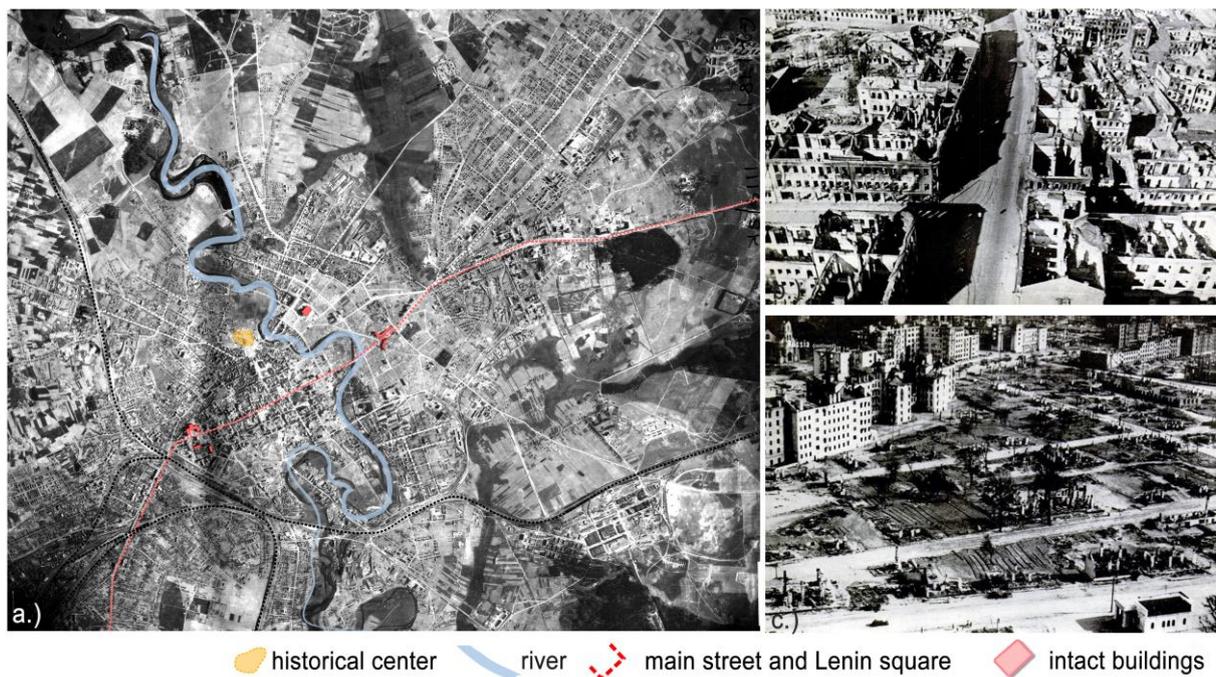

historical center   river   main street and Lenin square   intact buildings

Figure 3. Destruction of Minsk after the II World war; [Available at http://englishrussia.com/, Copyright © 2014 English Russia].

A Modern City

In 1946, the reconstruction plan was an important document in Minsk's urban history. It was a definitive project, which changed the city's image radically, transforming into the *ideal city* from the Soviet urban planning view, which corresponded to that of new cities:

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[…] which were characterized by their extensive arteries, large green areas, the majestic and multiplicity of collective buildings found in central areas, the absence of social segregation and the difference in architecture between the different districts (Fernández 2005).

The urban proposals made in the General Plan have defined the function and development of the city until today. The document established the following points in the city's reconstruction (Borovoy 2004; fig 4):

- Rationalization of the general urban structure, by the conversion of the existing orthogonal system into a concentric system;
- The idea of two perpendicular diameters, the main avenue and the green axis, which would form the architectural and spatial structure of the city;
- The expansion of main radial roads;
- The creation of a system of continuous green corridors;
- Urban zoning of the city: the tertiary uses were located in the centre of the city and the residential and industrial zones were situated in the perimeters;
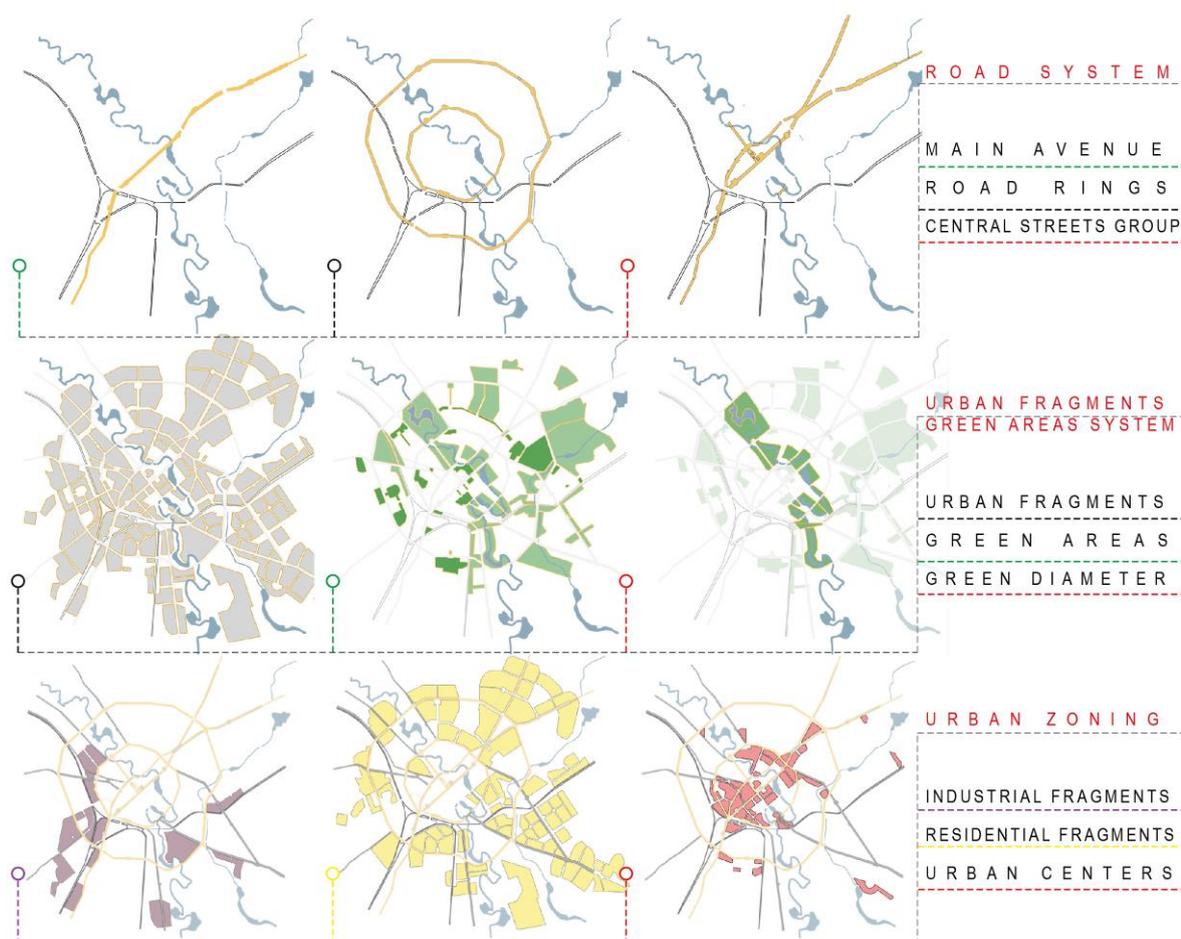- Creation and development of the new urban centre.
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Figure 4. Principal urban elements of the Master Plan for 1946 (developed by the author).

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In other words, these proposals restructured the road system and segregated urban functions. Thus, a concentric urban structure with high road specification and hierarchy and strict zoning by function was set. These features refer to modernist ideas in urban planning, in which the relevance of the rationalization of urban space through the city's division into fragmented urban areas stands out. From the crisis of industrial cities, the primary role of rational urban planning based on the modernist concepts was to improve the quality of urban life through the reorganization of urban structure and creation of universal urban models. The concept of the Modern Movement was an international notion reaching several countries and cultures. In 1925 W. Gropius said: 'Most citizens of a country have the same life and living habits; it is not understood, therefore, why our buildings should not undergo a similar unification to our dresses, shoes, cars…' (in Benevolo 1994, p. 559).

By contrast, post-war soviet urbanism had two primary objectives (Kosenkova 2009):

- Overcoming the economic level of the period prior to the II World War in the first quinquenal plan[11] by reinforcement of the industrial sector, and as a consequence deal with the population increment due to the rural-urban migration;
- Creation of the ideal city, which will hold the socialist ideology through the construction of buildings with a monumental and representative character.

That is, the government's ideology played a key role in socialist urban development. Besides the application of rationalist ideas, the Soviet urbanism paid attention to the development of urban projects according to the policy doctrine, which aimed at raising the population's national identity through the construction of 'palaces for people' (as numerous Sport, Youth and Cultural Palaces, etc.), sports arenas, wide avenues, etc. (Klinov 2013). In other words, it aimed to create a city at a monumental scale, which should have represented the autocratic power of the time.

The combination of the urban planning objectives of the Soviet Union and the concepts of rationalist planning created a new soviet urbanism. Attributing the properties of this type of urban development to the specific characteristics of the Minsk's Master Plan for 1946, we can see that the main reconstruction program was based on the idea to regenerate economic potential, by developing an industrial sector in the peripheral areas of the city, and create an ideologically *correct city.*

Therefore, the urban structure reorganization and functional zoning of Minsk refers to the Modern Movement concepts established in the Athens Charter. In turn, the land uses distribution, the prevalence if the residential and industrial sectors were based on the economic and ideological system of the Soviet Union. The expansion of the industrial sector in the South-West part of the city, reflecting the need to reinforce the economy; however, the location of the formal uses in the geographical centre demonstrates the idea of creating a monumental architectural ensemble, accompanied by emblematic architecture. That is, the overall organization of the city is based on the functional aims, whereas the new edification of the city's central area corresponds to the Soviet ideology.

Soviet urban design/planning may be considered as a product of the Modern Movement; therefore, it has a similar goal to rationalize the city structure. However, the way in which the concepts are expressed is different: if in the case of the Modern Movement it is rational

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[11] The five-year plans for the development of the national economy were a series of nation-wide centralized economic plans in the Soviet Union.

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organization in both urban planning and architectural representation, in Soviet urban planning an ideological side is presented, which requires the construction of a monumental and decorative architecture. The features of both ideas are markedly reflected in the reconstruction of Minsk. On the one hand, at the time of the Minsk post-war reconstruction, the government had an autocratic character, which was reflected in the architectural decisions made; on the other hand, the fast transformation of former city into a city based on the soviet urban model expresses the ideas of rational planning.

Totalitarian Architecture[12]

Beside the coupling of economic and social needs through Minsk's urban structural reorganization, the reconstruction program included the creation of a new symbolic city centre that might reflect the idea of a *new soviet society*. Therefore, a new post-war structure of Minsk could be expressed in a scheme *city within the city:* the first is the *ideal city,* played by the arrangement of the centre of Minsk, which was subordinated to ideological interests; the second corresponds to the new residential and industrial areas.

The construction of the city centre coincided with the time of the overall city's reorganization. By contrast, in terms of its concept, it represents different ideas compared to the rest of the city. If the periphery of Minsk is composed by urban (residential, industrial) fragments, the centre presents the traditional city with an orthogonal structure built by the totalitarian *style architecture* reflected in the monumental buildings. In other words:

> The totalitarian style reflects ideas of Soviet realism which was an accepted standard and officially promoted by a regime which searched the definition of an image, which: 'made each building a monument of its period, monument to victory and triumph (…) a sincere style as the Pompeian buildings or like the harmony of classic architecture' (Itriago Pels 2006, p. 55).

The centre of Minsk is made up of a main road and three governmental squares that establish the central area structure. The central area has symbolic weight, interpreting utopic ideas of the socialist ideology (collective activities, demonstration and parades, etc.) (Klinov 2013). In 1945 a design competition for the central ensemble of Minsk was organized. At this time the importance to create a representative centre, which would emphasize the governmental ideology, was already recognized. Precisely for this reason, the eleven projects submitted to the competition, despite belonging to different authors, had similar programs and concepts: (I) transformation of the existing street over a representative axis accompanied by architecture of imperial character; (II) the creation of hard squares to contain military parades and show soviet autocratic power. The winning project for the central plaza proposed the construction of a large open space with the monument in Stalin's honour in the middle of the square and galleries off the main street to watch the military parades (fig. 5).
In terms of its structure, the new axis mimics the route of the pre-existing road from the pre-war period. However, its appearance changes dramatically. In fig. 6 the difference between the existing street and the avenue that was created can be clearly seen. Apart from expanding the street, its scale was changed from the urban and architectural point of view. The building typology was modified, traditional blocks became *kvartales*[13] with garden interiors and architecture achieved monumental character.

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[12] With the term totalitarian architecture, we refer to the socialist realism style.
[13] The idea of *kvartal* or superblock, which develops a scheme already used in nineteenth-century projects for gardened blocks, in the same time *kvartal* shows some overlap with rationalist blocks.
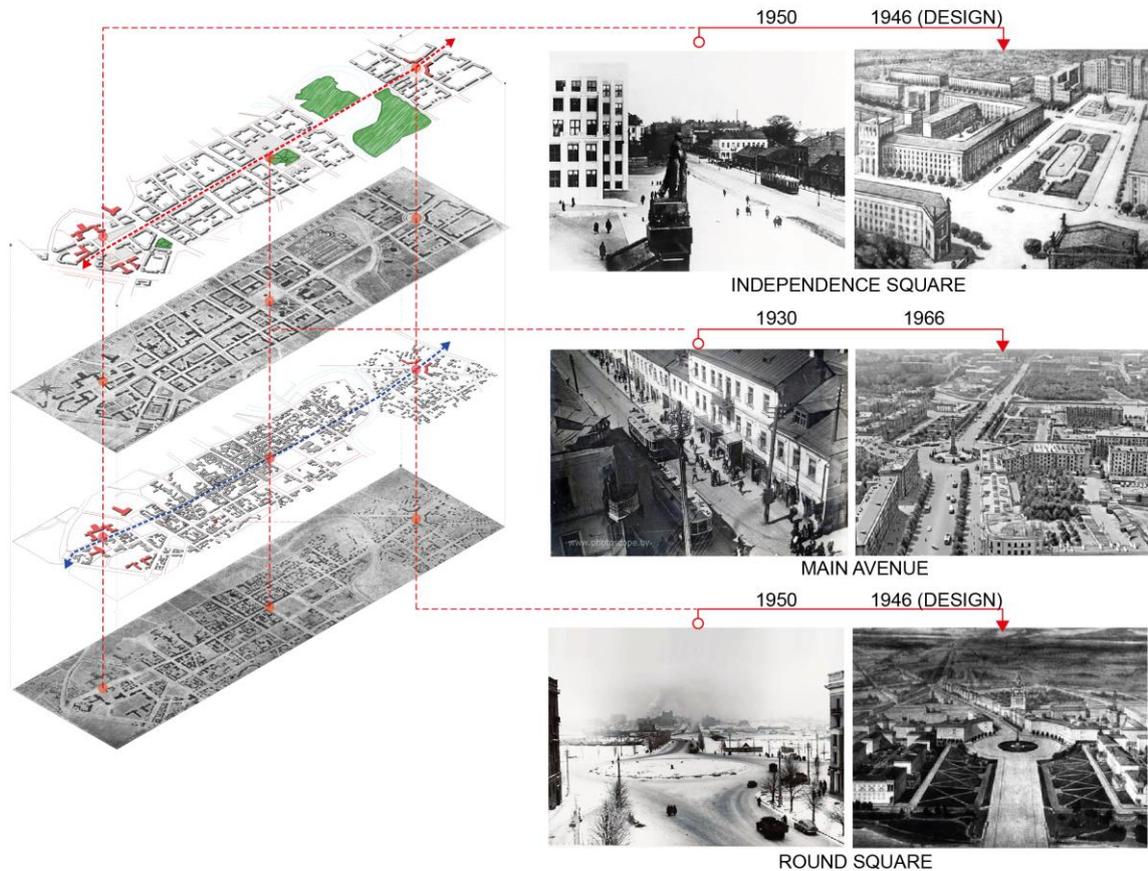
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Figure 5. Project of transformation of the main street of the pre-war city to a representative central avenue (developed by the author on the basis of Osmolovskiy 1952).
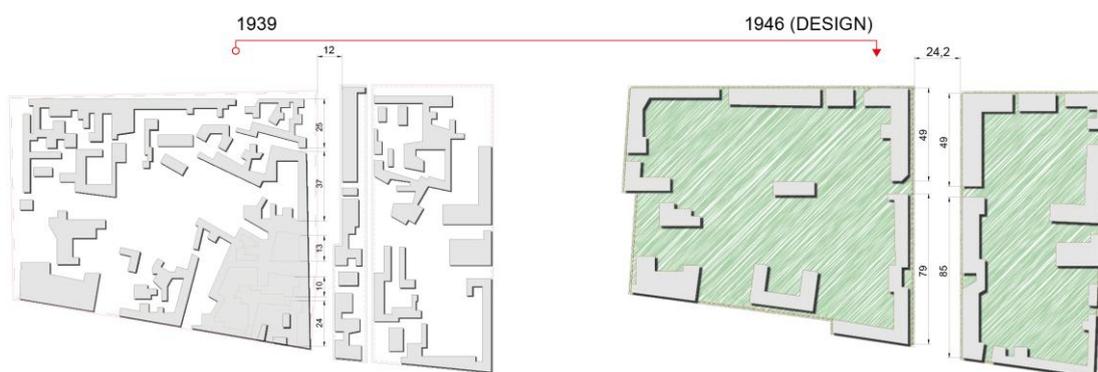

Figure 6. Structural and morphological changes of urban blocks in the transformed main street (developed by the author on the basis of Osmolovskiy 1952).

Therefore, from the figures above we can see that the project for the centre of Minsk deserves special attention because it represents the idea of a utopian socialist city, the

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construction of which, for various reasons[14], was not possible in other cities within the Soviet Union.

Devastation as an urban transformation engine

According to Itrago Pels' definition of reconstructive strategies, Minsk's reconstruction was carried out under the '*refounding strategy'*: the omission of the city's past in favour of its new development.

Analysing three plans of Minsk: the plan of the pre-war period (1941), the sketch of the Master Plan (1944) and the Master Plan (1946), one can observe the transformation of the urban structure since 1941 until 1946. If the plan of 1941 represents the city with an orthogonal structure, then, in the 1944 proposal, a few attributes of the concentric model are highlighted. Nevertheless, due to the fact that the sketch plan focuses on the development of the central part of the city and on the recovery of important governmental buildings (Linevich 2010) some characteristics of the orthogonal structure, such as street network, are conserved. On the other hand, in the Master Plan for 1946, the concentric model comes into force without leaving any features belonging to the previous structure. Therefore, the sketch plan was an intermediate stage between the historical city and the urban model of the Soviet city (fig. 7).
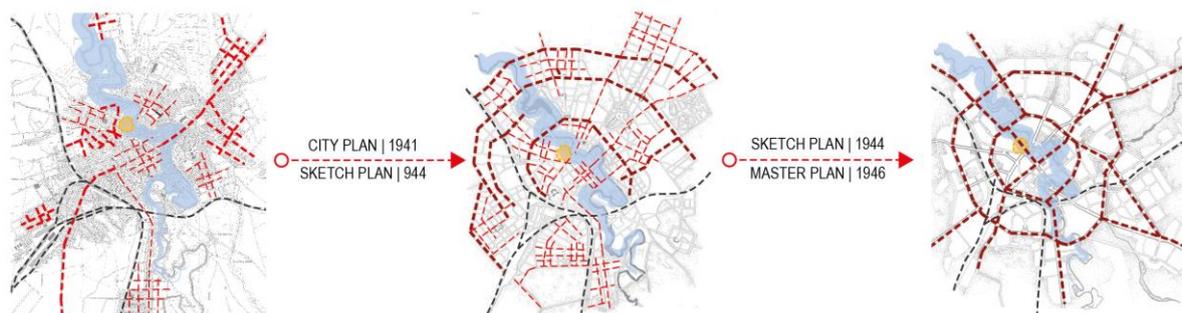

Figure 7. Transitional process from the historical urban structure to the Soviet Urban model (developed by the author on the basis of Plans for 1938, 1944 and 1946 available at the archives of the Institute of Urban Planning of Minsk).

The existence of the intermediate design clearly explains the reconstruction program that was accepted for Minsk's rebuilding: forgetting the pre-existing city and creating a new one that should represent the soviet urban model. Precisely the application of the omission strategy turned Minsk into an interesting case and put it in the line with other new soviet cities. Certainly, the model of the Soviet city would have had to be developed in Moscow, in the capital of the country. In 1935 there was even a proposal for the new Master Plan of Moscow which later was taken as an example for the redevelopment of Minsk:

> […] out of the detailed study of 16 Principles of Socialistic Urbanism the ideological dimension of the urban transformation company in which Stalin threw himself into, was established. The height of this company began with the reconstruction plan of Moscow, to turn it into the symbolic capital of Socialist Realism (Quilici 1978, p. 54).

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[14] These reasons will be discussed in the next section.

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The plan was based on the proposals of previous years (New Moscow Plan and the Great Moscow Plan developed during 1918-1925, fig 8), which respected the pre-existing structure of the city. In the sketch plan of 1935, with the idea of constructing a new city and leaving the former one as an outdoor museum, the designers came to the conclusion to preserve the ancient city, but with a radical reorganization of its urban structure. Nevertheless, because of the presence of a rich urban history and with a lower destruction index during the II World War, the proposals made for the reconstruction of Moscow were not achieved. In the same way, in the case of Minsk, due to the constant devastations, cultural changes and the almost total destruction of the city after the II World War, the image of the city could be radically changed, achieving the social and urban changes which could not have been possible under other circumstances (Klinov 2013).
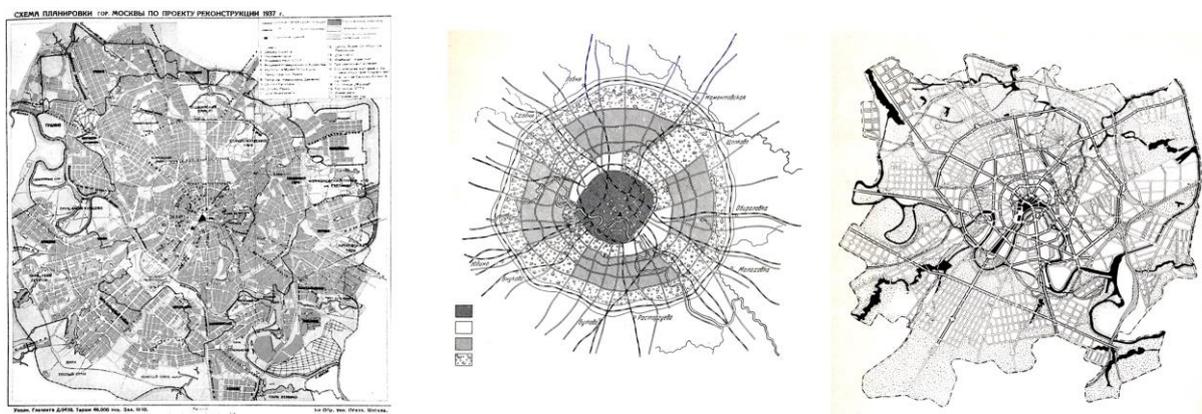

Figure 8. Moscow Plan (late XIX century); Scheme for the Great Moscow Plan (1925); Moscow's Master Plan for 1938 (Quilici 1978, p. 19, 169, 262).

Therefore, we assume that a huge grade of the physical and cultural deterioration may cause a selection of a tabula-rasa reconstruction program and lead to a rapid and total urban transformation (Itriago Pels 2006; Vale & Campanella 2005).

The Soviet City

The urban change led by the massive deterioration of Minsk is a key point in its development. Due to the almost complete devastation of the city, the material capturing of the soviet urban model, which was established in the Master Plan of Moscow of 1935, was possible. Thus, the analysis of Minsk's Master Plan of 1946 helps to define typical characteristics of the soviet city:

- Rationalization of the urban structure reflected in the hierarchical structuring and road network specialization, urban zoning and functional segregation.
- Establishment of complex road categories, which defined the configuration of urban fragments, which at the same time are divided in functional zones depending on their use (residential, industrial, formal).
- Designing of each fragment as a self-sufficient and separate unit.
- Creation of an urban centre with formal and representative character, accompanied by totalitarian style architecture and emblematic buildings.

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In many aspects, the characteristics mentioned, coincide with the urban concepts of rationalist planning modified depending on the socialist ideology. The division of the city into two parts, a central part with a formal use and another functional part with residential and industrial character, had the aim to fulfil the main tasks of the soviet urbanism development of the period: (i) an increase in the economic level of the country through the promotion of the industrial sector; (ii) supply of housing for the population and (iii) reinforcement of the ideological influence via the construction of an *ideal city.*

In summary, the Soviet city represents a combination of urban concepts and architectural styles: 'Forced by the circumstances, the USSR constructed a hybrid, empirical and changeable urbanism, whose foundations would come about by the forefront culture and the proposals of western rationalism' (Quilici 1978, p. 56). In other words, double eclecticism is present, which is reflected in the monumental architecture, which appropriates elements from different architectural styles (socialist realism) and a mixture of two urban concepts: the first one based on the rationalist ideas and the second one linked with the governmental ideology.

The composition of these two elements can be observed in case of the city of Minsk, where the periphery corresponds to the rational city and the centre represents the Ideal City constructed through totalitarian architecture.

Reconstruction, memory and heritage

The materialization of new urban design, proposed in the Master Plan of Moscow for 1935 for the first time, was punctual and did not bring radical changes in the city structure to life. In Moscow's case, due to the presence of a valuable old centre, it was impossible to erase the urban layers that have accumulated during the city's history. Another example, which corresponds to the same period, is the reconstruction of Warsaw that shows that the complete devastation of the material urban structure does not necessarily lead to the construction of a new city. In the case of Warsaw, the reconstruction process became a struggle against the soviet ideologies in order to re-establish national identity.

By contrast, in Minsk's case, we are dealing with a total redefinition of the city via new urban planning according to the soviet doctrine. The building of a new city was taken as an opportunity to embody a model of soviet urban planning that might conjure a feeling of pride in citizens' minds. From its origins and during its history, Minsk was destroyed and reconstructed numerous times changing its appearance constantly; furthermore, due to the location between two cultures (eastern and western Europe), the city has never had the opportunity to create its own identity and specific urban culture. Therefore, the destruction during World War II was not the only reason for the total rebuilding of the city but rather a catalyst for new urban development that could create a new identity without losing the historical traits of the previous city.

Nevertheless, the Soviet Union was a political regime or ideology rather than a country with a strong national identity or a civilisation with a long cultural history[15]. After its dissolution, in

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[15] See the case of Jerusalem, which during its history was constantly destroyed and conquered but has never lost its identity because of ideas and practices to promote individual and social resilience that helps to remain the previous urban structure as a representation of the national identity; and the case of China's cities, in which the rebuilding of urban structure is understood as a progress that shows their technical excellence that coexists with the age-old traditions (in Vale & Campanella 2005).

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1991, the architecture, which was once created in order to popularize the soviet doctrine, lost its value and the influence that it had during the socialist period. Assuming that Minsk's reconstruction was based on the soviet urban model and has not changed its structure until today, it is important to comprehend what meaning the Soviet architecture has for citizens and whether it has the potential to be converted into soviet urban heritage.

According to a list of historical and cultural sites in the territory of Minsk[16], priority is given to single buildings and not to architectural or urban complexes, which does not permit the establishment of a structured program that should not only deal with material components of national heritage but also preserve, or in the case of Minsk even create, urban history and memory. The absence of valuable historical architecture that can be found in most capitals leads to the reproduction of a 'careful copy of its [valued piece of an old environment] original state' (Lynch 2007, p. 294)[17] or even a construction of a fake heritage in order to create historical sites that have never existed and cannot substitute the authentic inheritance. As Lynch states: '[Preservation policies] correspond to our wish to arrest the past - but we cannot easily reproduce the circumstances that created it' (2007, p. 294). Nevertheless, there are examples of reproduction (or creation) of a fictitious heritage that mimics the characteristics of the truthful historical patrimony. The transformation of Barcelona's downtown in a Barri Gòtic (Gothic Quarter) is a good example of accurate management that led not only to the attraction of numerous tourists but also shaped national and citizen identity (Garcia-Fuentes 2010).

Notwithstanding, we argue that in the case of Minsk, the reproduction of historical monuments[18] or preservation of a few existing ones, would not reach the same success than in Barcelona's case. The continuous material destruction and cultural devastation, trespassing from one country to another during its history did not allow for an uninterrupted urban memory, which has great value in order to create the identity of a place. Therefore, the Master Plan for 1946 can be considered as a starting point in the creation of Minsk's new urban history promoting it as a representative case of soviet urban planning and architecture. According to Sircus there are some principles to follow to create a 'successful place (...) weather it's created over centuries, or created instantly': a story such as a 'strong metaphor for a place'; a sequential experience that permits 'experiencing a place as much like following a river'; visual communication that means that the place should be readable; and an interaction between the user and the place (2007, pp. 127-128). Connecting these principles to Minsk's urban structure and architecture, we assume, that in order to convert the currently unappreciated by most of the local people Soviet architecture (Klinov 2013) into the heritage, the main aim should be to ascribe the characteristics and qualities of a place of pride to the central city, by promoting it as a Soviet urban model. We assume, that the attribution of these characteristics to Minsk's urban centre may help (i) to create an identity that is 'a basic feature of our experience of places' (Relph 2007, p. 104), (ii) to fill in voids in the collective memory and (ii) to awake an interest in society, changing their perception towards their home town. At the same time, we are aware that inheritance is a delicate process that is closely connected to collective and individual memory. In some cases, the generations that experienced ideologically and economically difficult soviet reality also ascribe negative feelings to the soviet urban and architectural culture. Thus, before promoting the centre of

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[16] This information was obtained from the open sources of the Ministry of Culture of Republic of Belarus.
[17] See a project of a 'historical' Town Hall constructed in 2009.
[18] For example, a City Hall building that was constructed in 2003 as an identical copy of the original one that was destroyed in 1857 by the ordinance of Nicolay I.

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Minsk as soviet heritage it is important to study narratives regarding its soviet past in order to avoid the creation of an *undesirable heritage*[19].

As we can see from the analysis of different cases, the reconstruction process in most cases needs an contextual approach due to the huge variety in cultural, economic and political aspects. Warsaw's, Berlin's and Minsk's reconstructions, which despite of being destroyed because of the similar reasons, in the same period and with similar destruction indexes, were not executed in the same way. In the case of Minsk, the Soviet architecture and urban planning received complete citizens' approval that permitted building a new city in accordance with wishes of the ruling elite. In Warsaw's reconstruction, the intrusion of soviet urban concepts led to complete rejection of these ideas; whereas, in Berlin we can observe the presence of both strategies: the Eastern part was decided upon by the Soviet authority, while the Western sector was developed discarding any urban ideas from the socialist East.
The reconstruction process and heritage issues are connected with one another, presenting two sides of the same coin. The selection of one or another reconstructive strategy and posterior preservation of urban structure and architecture is an expression of political, economic and social situation in a city's structure. Nevertheless, architects and urban planners who are faced with the rebuilding of devastated cities frequently do not have sufficient knowledge or experience in urban reconstruction in an emergency situation (Itriago Pels 2006). Taking into account that the selection of a reconstructive strategy and heritage policy not only encompass recuperation or preservation of material form but also involves a social and political process, a multidisciplinary approach becomes relevant in order to meet the challenge to restore and maintain the urban form and memory.

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[19] The term undesirable heritage was introduced by Sharon Macdonald in his publication Undesirable Heritage.

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