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PROVINCIAL CITY OR REGIONAL CAPITAL? CONCEPTS AND BARRIERS TO THE REBUILDING OF WROCLAW IN 1945–1947 FROM WARTIME DESTRUCTION

PROWINCJONALNE MIASTO CZY REGIONALNA STOLICA? KONCEPCJE I BARIERY ODBUDOWY WROCLAWIA ZE ZNISZCZEŃ WOJENNYCH 1945–1947

ABSTRACT: The destruction suffered by Wrocław as a result of warfare in 1945 threatened the further existence of the city, which from May of that year constituted the largest urbanised area of the western and northern lands ceded to Poland by the Allies. The main challenge faced by the Polish administration in the capital of Lower Silesia in the first period of its functioning, i.e. between 1945 and 1947, was to make an inventory of losses in the urban substance, develop a reconstruction concept for the city and begin its implementation.

KEYWORDS: Wrocław, Festung Breslau, war damage, reconstruction plan

The Second World War had a particularly harsh impact on the Polish lands. The war caused the death of 6 million citizens of the Polish Republic, which, from an area of 400,000 km² and over 35 million citizens in 1939, decreased to just over 300,000 km² and a population estimated in 1950 at 25 million. This meant the loss of 20% of the territory and almost 10 million citizens¹, with particularly high losses in urban population. Of the 6 pre-war big-city centres, i.e. Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, Łódź, Lviv (Lwów) and Vilnius, Vilnius and Lviv were lost to the USSR,

¹ Waldemar Grabowski, *Straty osobowe II Rzeczypospolitej w latach II wojny światowej*, "Pamięć i Tożsamość. Biuletyn IPN", 9 (154), September 2018, pp. 28–33.

while Warsaw was destroyed in 80%. In the remaining 3 cities, elites representing their real intellectual value and professional potential, such as teachers, lawyers or entrepreneurs, were destroyed². Other social groups, such as landowners, experienced the open hostility of the new authorities and the loss of their property, while a large part of the intelligentsia found themselves under the watchful eye of the authorities of the forming “people’s” Poland. Overall, Poland’s losses in national property amounted to 38–39% of the 1939 level. The Germans destroyed 162,190,000 buildings, 353,876 homesteads, nearly 200,000 shops, 84,436 workshops and 14,000 factories. In chemical industry losses reached 64.5%, in printing industry – 64.3%, in electrical engineering – 59.7%, in clothing industry – 55.4%, in food industry – 53.1%, and in metallurgical industry – 48%. As for the transport infrastructure, for example, 2/3 of the railway viaducts and bridges, 1/3 of the railway tracks, and 80% of the rolling stock were destroyed. Gdynia, as well as Gdańsk and Szczecin, which were ceded to Poland after the war, lost more than half of their port facilities³.

As a result of the war, Poland lost the eastern half of the country, i.e. 47% of the area, to the USSR. It was to be compensated with the so-called Recovered Territories, which until 1945 had been the German eastern borderlands. The decision of the Allied Powers, the so-called Big Three, made only at the beginning of 1945 in Yalta, placed “under Polish administration” 103,000 km², i.e. 24% of the German territory of 1937, inhabited by 8.5 million people. At that time, these lands generated 6% of Germany’s industrial output, 23% of its agricultural production, and their share of GDP was 12% in 1937. Their deposits of various natural resources were particularly rich⁴. For Poland, however, the value of this “territorial compensation” was significantly reduced by war damage, as these lands suffered direct war losses as well as deliberate German destruction and evacuation, and post-war Soviet looting⁵. The discussion about the real value of the acquired territories continues to this day. The object of dispute is not so much the absolutely higher

² *Sprawozdanie w przedmiocie strat i szkód wojennych Polski w latach 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1947, <https://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/publication/52713> (access: 11 XII 2019).

³ *Ibidem*.

⁴ Janusz Kaliński, *Wpływ zmiany granic politycznych na gospodarkę Polski powojennej*, [in:] *Kresy Zachodnie. Gospodarcze i społeczne znaczenie polskich kresów*, ed. Tomasz Głowiński, Wrocław 2015, pp. 127–128.

⁵ Hubert Modrawski, *Ziemia Odzyskane 1945–1956*, Brzezina Łąka 2015, pp. 34–48. Jędrzej Chumiński, *Stan przemysłu wrocławskiego w 1945 r. (wybrane zagadnienia)*, [in:] *Studia nad społeczeństwem Wrocławia 1945–1949*, eds. Bożena Kilmczak, Waław Długoborski, Wrocław 1990, p. 59.

economic potential of these areas before the war, as their actual state in 1945 and also to what extent Poland was able to use their potential effectively⁶. For it was an indisputable fact that in the “new” Polish territories 40% of the urban buildings were destroyed and only in the south of Lower Silesia, Jelenia Góra or Wałbrzych, were basically untouched by the war. While Wrocław and Szczecin were seas of ruins, the rich and varied industry of the “Recovered Territories” was hit to the same degree by both the war and the post-war plunder.

The urban network of the “Recovered Territories” comprised 252 centres, of which 112 had to be classified as small towns and tiny towns. The most important city was Wrocław. From the time the Soviet-protected Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego – PKWN) installed a surrogate government in Lublin in July 1944, which explicitly renounced its aspirations for the pre-war eastern half of the country, it became clear that the capital of Lower Silesia would be a kind of compensation for lost Lvov and Vilnius. By the end of 1944, Warsaw was already in ruins, while Breslau was still untouched by the war. Thus it began to be considered as the first city of the “new” lands and potentially the second capital of Poland. These ideas were echoed during Bolesław Bierut’s August 1945 visit to Wrocław, when he referred to the capital of Lower Silesia as “the second Polish city after Warsaw”⁷.

For Wrocław, the first half of 1945 was the most dramatic time in the city’s history. Among the German cities bombed since 1942, the capital of Lower Silesia was regarded as “the Third Reich’s air-raid shelter”. Though the first bombs fell on Breslau already in November 1941, yet it was only a “propaganda” raid⁸. The first large air raid on Breslau took place on 7th November 1944, and was followed by others, but the losses were not severe⁹. It was not until mid-February 1945 that the destruction of the city began. The battle for Festung Breslau lasted 3 months, until 6th May 1945. The crew of the fortress resisted the Soviets effectively and managed to persevere for so long. However, the city paid for its determined defence with destroyed buildings and infrastructure. The most devastated areas of Wrocław were

⁶ Yaman Kouli discusses this from a German perspective in his recently published book *Dolny Śląsk 1936–1956. Szybki rozwój i nieudana odbudowa. Wpływ wiedzy na produkcję przemysłową*, Warszawa 2018.

⁷ Gregor Thum, *Obce miasto. Wrocław 1945 i potem*, Wrocław 2007, p. 185.

⁸ Alfred Konieczny, *Śląsk w wojnie powietrznej 1940–1944*, Wrocław 1996, p. 166.

⁹ Tomasz Głowiński, “Nalot wielkanocny” 1945 roku – największa apokalipsa w tysiącletniej historii Wrocławia, [in:] *Przedmieście Piaskowe we Wrocławiu*, eds. Tomasz Głowiński, Halina Okólska, Wrocław 2015, pp. 214–216.

those where the main fights took place, i.e. in the south and west of the city. The greatest losses, however, were suffered in the historical centre, as the area of Ostrów Tumski, Sand Island (Wyspa Piasek) and the area surrounding the Old Town Square, was almost razed to the ground as a result of the so-called Easter air raids¹⁰.

Apart from direct war damage, Wrocław also suffered from arson, looting and vandalism. They affected the city mainly because of the Soviet “liberators”¹¹. The total loss of urban substance in Wrocław was 68%, although some districts were almost untouched by the war, such as Biskupin and Śępolno. Whereas the southern and western districts were destroyed in 90%, the Old Town and Downtown (Śródmieście) suffered an average of 50% damage, but other parts of the city were destroyed in 10 to 30%. In many cases, however, lightly damaged houses turned into ruins within 2–3 years due to lack of proper care and reconstruction. The lighting system of the city was destroyed in 100%, the tramway network in 80%. The gasworks and power plant suffered severely – both were devastated in 60%. The sewage and water supply systems of the city did not work and the gas network was destroyed in 80%. All of Wrocław’s industry was damaged in 60%, and 30% was destroyed in half. Monuments suffered to an even greater extent¹². The city was initially impassable, as 300 km of Wrocław’s 658 km of streets were covered with rubble¹³.

Works on the organisation of an administrative structure that would prepare and be responsible for the rebuilding of Wrocław began in March 1945. The Planning and Reconstruction Office at the Presidium of the Council of Ministers undertook this work in Warsaw, commissioning a Poznań architect, Roman Feliński, to organise an operational group for Lower Silesia. This group was initially based in Trzebnica and constituted the beginning of the Voivodship Reconstruction Office (WBO)¹⁴. In the summer of 1945, a Regional Spatial Planning Office was established in Wrocław, subordinate to the WBO, later renamed the Regional

¹⁰ Radosław Szewczyk, *Naloty wielkanocne*, “Pamięć i Przyszłość”, 4 (2019), (46), pp. 30–37.

¹¹ For a long time the “only right” interpretation of the issue of arson was accepted, i.e. the claim that their perpetrators were “an illegal Nazi organisation, the so-called Wehrwolf formed as late as March 1945”. Marek Ordyłowski, *Życie codzienne we Wrocławiu 1945–1948*, Wrocław 1991, p. 15.

¹² The condition of Wrocław’s monuments and their reconstruction was most fully described by: Marcin Bukowski, *Wrocław z lat 1945–1952. Zniszczenia i dzieło odbudowy*, Wrocław 1985.

¹³ Edmund Małachowicz, *Stare Miasto we Wrocławiu. Zniszczenie, odbudowa, program*, Warszawa–Wrocław 1976, pp. 86–87; Ordyłowski, *Życie codzienne*, p. 11.

¹⁴ Daria Przyłęcka, *Nie od razu Wrocław odbudowano. Plany zagospodarowania przestrzennego, koncepcje oraz projekty urbanistyczne i architektoniczne a ich realizacja w latach 1945–1989*, Wrocław 2012, pp. 11–12.

Spatial Planning Directorate (RDPP). Another change took place in March 1946, when the Wrocław Planning Bureau (BPW), headed by architect Tadeusz Ptaszycki, was established within the structure of the RDPP¹⁵. However, before the rebuilding of the city could be planned, both of these institutions first had to assess its condition. To this end, a new structure was established as part of the Wrocław administration¹⁶, that was being formed from 10th May 1945. It was the Building Department of the City Board, headed by engineer Józef Rybicki¹⁷. It was its employees, as the executive department operating under the management system, who were the first to start protection measures and sometimes also repair works in the city. They were complemented by work undertaken by other operational groups, which operated in the city in a kind of “sectoral” fashion, on behalf of the Warsaw ministries, taking over, for example, banks, schools and industrial plants¹⁸.

The first qualitative change in the approach to rebuilding of Wrocław took place in the summer of 1945, after a visit of Michał Kaczorowski, head of the Ministry of Reconstruction, when the Delegation of the Ministry of Reconstruction was established in the city, and in September of that year the first funds were allocated by the government, making it possible to launch tenders for removing the rubble. Whereas responsibility for repair and protection works throughout the city was taken over by the Wrocław Branch of the Ministry of Reconstruction, headed by Józef Zaremba¹⁹. The second significant change was brought by the creation of the Wrocław Reconstruction Directorate (WDO) on 12th January 1946. It was directly subordinate to the Ministry of Reconstruction, but the Programme Commission supervising its work included representatives of the municipal and voivodship authorities. The director of WDO became the aforementioned engineer J. Rybicki, whose contribution to the reconstruction of Wrocław at that time cannot be overestimated²⁰.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹⁶ The State Archives in Wrocław (Archiwum Państwowe we Wrocławiu, hereinafter: APWr), Municipal Authority of the City of Wrocław (Zarząd Miejski m. Wrocławia, hereinafter: ZMMw), ref. 64, pp. 1–25.

¹⁷ Bukowski, *Wrocław z lat 1945–1952*, p. 187.

¹⁸ Jakub Tyszkiewicz, *Wrocławska Dyrekcja Odbudowy. Próba ratowania tkanki miejskiej w latach 1946–1949*, “Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 54 (1999), 3, pp. 421–422.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 422.

²⁰ APWr, Wrocław Reconstruction Directorate (Wrocławska Dyrekcja Odbudowy, hereinafter: WDO), ref. 239, pp. 30–32.

Within the structure of the WDO there were 4 departments: construction, technical, commissioning and inspection departments, which dealt with the renovation of public buildings and monuments, as well as with cleaning and demolition issues in the city. The WDO also supervised renovations carried out by state and private companies²¹. The creation of the Directorate did not bring about any breakthrough in the rebuilding of Wrocław, although this institution rendered great service in saving its monuments. The WDO was subordinate to the Ministry of Reconstruction and had no administrative or financial independence. Due to the enormity of the war damage on a national scale, the funds received from the Ministry for the reconstruction of Wrocław were very limited, so even the necessary tasks were carried out too slowly and insufficiently²².

Two parties were politically involved in the activities of the new Wrocław authorities indicated here: the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), which, after the Red Army's entry into Poland in 1944, seized power with its help and established the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN). Some members of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS) joined its structures to form a joint Provisional Government of National Unity. With the consent of the Soviet Command, a day after the capitulation of the Festung Breslau, a group of the PPS, led by Kraków-born Dr Bolesław Drobner, who had been envisaged as Mayor of Wrocław from 14th March 1945, "installed" themselves in the ruined city and set about assessing the state of the urban fabric. This work was entrusted to people of varying degrees of professional competence, employed by the Building Department of the City Board²³, and a preliminary picture of the city's condition was drawn up on 15th June 1945. Before its destruction, there were 32,000 residential, 19,000 industrial and 620 public buildings in Wrocław. Of these, as many as 50.4%, in the first two mentioned categories and 46% in the third, were considered destroyed²⁴. As 21,600 residential buildings were counted as damaged or destroyed, one of the first tasks of the Polish authorities in Wrocław was to start removing the rubble from the city, since almost its entire surface was covered with debris from broken and damaged

²¹ APWr, WDO, ref. 241, pp. 13–15.

²² The activity of WDO is assessed in a similar way by Tyszkiewicz, *Wrocławska Dyrekcja*, pp. 433–434.

²³ APWr, ZMmW, ref. 64, pp. 12–13.

²⁴ APWr, Wrocław Voivodship Office (Urząd Wojewódzki Wrocławski, hereinafter: UWW), ref. 12.1 XIII/38, p. 5; XIII/45, p. 2.

buildings²⁵. It was estimated at about 18 million m³, but in the years 1945–1947 no plan for its removal was worked out²⁶. The emergency removal of rubble in the first months after the capitulation of Festung Breslau concerned mainly the main traffic routes and squares²⁷. By the end of 1945, around 150 tenements assessed as being in ruins had been demolished in Wrocław²⁸. Later, however, until the end of 1947, the clearing works were largely of an interventionist nature and therefore, even 3 years after the war, heaps of rubble still lay everywhere²⁹. The damaged buildings posed a real threat, as evidenced by a series of their collapses in the autumn of 1947, which were made public in the local press³⁰. Until 1949, approximately 200 buildings that could not be renovated were demolished every year. However, even later, their number did not decrease, as a result of post-war negligence and lack of renovations³¹.

From the second quarter of 1946 to the beginning of 1949 the demolition and cleaning activities in the city were taken over by the WDO Technical Department, which – apart from removing the rubble – was obliged to obtain building material (bricks) from it to cover the investments being carried out at that time³². The lack of an action plan did not mean that the gradual removal of rubble from the city did not progress. It was visible, especially in the historic centre. There, in place of debris, new squares appeared, which for a shorter (such as Youth Square) or longer time (like Dzierżyński Square) became part of the city landscape. The scale of these actions to clean up the city space is evidenced by the fact that in 1947 alone 82,547 m³ of rubble were removed from Wrocław³³.

Removal of rubble on a larger scale began in the city only at the end of 1947, in connection with preparations for the Recovered Territories Exhibition, but the focus was then on those areas which were to be the “showpiece” of Polish

²⁵ APWr, WDO, ref. 30, p. 87.

²⁶ Przyłęcka, *Nie od razu Wrocław*, p. 66. For example, in August 1945, the City Cleaning Service cleaned up 1,500 m³ of rubble, and in November 3,000 m³ (APWr, ZMmW, ref. 67, pp. 8, 16).

²⁷ APWr, ZMmW, ref. 64, p. 13. In this period, the main burden of clearing debris fell on the shoulders of the German population. Norman Davies, Roger Moorhouse, *Mikrokosmos. Portret miasta środkowoeuropejskiego*, Kraków 2002, pp. 449–450.

²⁸ APWr, WDO, ref. 239, p. 62.

²⁹ These heaps were still to be found frequently in the city centre until the early 1970s. See Eduard Mühle, *Historia Wrocławia*, Warszawa 2016, p. 240.

³⁰ APWr, WDO, ref. 30, pp. 37–41, 43–54; Tyszkiewicz, *Wrocławska Dyrekcja*, p. 429.

³¹ Małachowicz, *Stare Miasto*, p. 117.

³² APWr, WDO, ref. 2, p. 5.

³³ Małachowicz, *Stare Miasto*, p. 116.

achievements in the city. These activities were heralded by the opening of a special railway line through the Old Town to service the removal of rubble³⁴. The removal of rubble, and in fact the recovery of bricks, began on a larger scale at the beginning of 1949, when, following the liquidation of the WDO, the Independent Department of Rubble Removal and then the Municipal Demolition Company were established. At that time, activities were undertaken which soon earned the capital of Lower Silesia the title of “the largest brick mine” in Poland³⁵. As early as in January 1949, up to 1 million bricks were “excavated” daily in Wrocław, both from rubble and demolition of destroyed buildings and also from buildings in good condition. It is known that in 1949 Wrocław “donated” 140 million bricks, mainly to the rebuilding city of Warsaw³⁶.

Alongside the removal of debris, the repair of buildings considered important began, which included public and housing buildings. In 1945, as mentioned earlier, the first renovations were carried out in the management system, i.e. the work was undertaken by working groups of the Building Department of the City Board, the Delegation of the Ministry of Reconstruction, and central institutions taking over specific buildings in the city for their own headquarters³⁷. By the end of 1945, several dozen buildings had been renovated, 20–30 of which were subject to major repairs. Among them were the City Hall, buildings of the University and Polytechnic, 2 hospitals and 2 hotels, a prison, the Court and several schools, banks and buildings for the administration³⁸. At the beginning of 1946, renovations were carried out in the building of the Voivodeship Office, the complex of buildings on Sądowa Street was restored, and the 11 most damaged churches and the cathedral were secured³⁹. In the case of the latter activities, there was considerable spontaneous public participation. However, due to the cold winter and scarce credit resources, it was not possible to launch renovation investments on an appropriate scale regarding the reconstruction of facilities for schools, hospitals, clinics and housing⁴⁰.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 116–117.

³⁵ Włodzimierz Suleja, *Historia Wrocławia*, vol. 3, Wrocław 2001, p. 38. APWr, ZMmW, ref. 863, pp. 6–22.

³⁶ Modrawski, *Ziemie Odzyskane*, p. 499.

³⁷ APWr, ZMmW, ref. 64, pp. 12–13.

³⁸ APWr, WDO, ref. 239, p. 27.

³⁹ APWr, WDO, ref. 12, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Tyszkiewicz, *Wrocławska Dyrekcja*, p. 425.

The year 1947 was supposed to be a year of investments in the housing substance in Wrocław⁴¹, due to the disastrous condition of residential buildings in the city and its growing population. Yet the WDO in that year had to join in the implementation of the nationwide Three-Year Plan⁴², which envisaged investments in housing, but only in its final phase, i.e. in 1949. Initially, priority for loans was given to the industrial and transport sectors, but in 1947, due to the harsh winter and delays by the Ministry of Reconstruction in transferring funds for investments, these were suspended until mid-year⁴³. In turn, from September it was recommended that no new investments should be started before winter, which meant an impasse in the rebuilding of Wrocław⁴⁴. Although the renovation of public buildings and monuments progressed, their total number, due to the lack of funds, was not impressive and amounted to 120. As estimated by the WDO, the city needed about 2 billion zlotys for repairs and reconstruction in 1947, but it received merely 339 million zlotys⁴⁵.

The impasse in the rebuilding of Wrocław in 1947, for whatever other reason, was also caused by a lack of a concept of what the city should become and what role it should play. In government circles in Lublin, prior to the start of the battle for Festung Breslau, it was assumed that Wrocław would be the second “capital” of Poland. Although of the big cities, Kraków and Łódź were also undamaged, but both could not be taken into account. The former was considered politically “reactionary” and was the “capital” of the Nazi General Government until 1945. Łódź, on the other hand, although it was a city of workers and with a “red” reputation, did not have the splendour of a metropolis. It turned out that also Wrocław could not be the “capital”, as between February and May 1945 it served as a Nazi fortress and its destruction was so great that it was compared with that of Warsaw. Thus, from a potential “war prize”, the capital of Lower Silesia became a problem for

⁴¹ APWr, WDO, ref. 30, pp. 107, 127.

⁴² Participation of the regional Reconstruction Directorates in the activities of the Three-Year Plan was already announced during the so-called Reconstruction Convention organised by the Ministry of Reconstruction in Warsaw on 13–14 II 1947. APWr, UWW, ref. 17.1 XVIII/2, pp. 1–5.

⁴³ APWr, WDO, ref. 30, p. 36.

⁴⁴ The awareness that 1947 was a failure in reconstruction was already apparent at the beginning of 1948, when this was articulated, for example, at a voivodship-level conference held in Wrocław on 9 II 1948. APWr, UWW, ref. 17.5 XVIII/120, pp. 2–8.

⁴⁵ APWr, WDO, ref. 30, p. 76. Tyszkiewicz, *Wrocławska Dyrekcja*, p. 429. In total, the WDO renovated 500 structures by 1948, of which 276 were residential houses (Thum, *Obce miasto*, p. 194).

Poland. Its further fate depended not only on the government in Warsaw, but also on a number of local factors, including barriers blocking the rebuilding and development of the city.

The first of these was political, as Wrocław and the pre-war German territories up to the Oder and Lusatian Neisse rivers were given to Poland in 1945 to administer, but not to own permanently⁴⁶. This matter was to be settled only by a peace conference, which never took place, and the “Recovered Territories” remained under Polish rule, but their international legal status remained unregulated for a long time⁴⁷. This gave rise to specific concerns as to whether it was worth investing in areas that could be taken away⁴⁸. This was an important issue, especially in a situation where indisputably Polish lands had also been destroyed and required a great deal of investment, and the ruined country could take only limited restoration measures. Warsaw had priority, but apart from the capital the “queue” of cities was very long, and Wrocław was not one of the first. The reconstruction of the capital was beyond discussion – it legitimised the authorities installed in the country “on Soviet bayonets”. In Wrocław’s case, the question was how many inhabitants could this ruined city accommodate in a relatively short period of time? Before the war it was inhabited by 650,000 people, but after the loss of 68% of its urban fabric, it could only support around 200,000–210,000 inhabitants. The settlement development of the city beyond this number required considerable investment. For these reasons, as Gregor Thum wrote, an “unofficially considered” concept of developing Wrocław as a city with an assumed population of around 200,000 appeared⁴⁹. This size should not be overestimated as a future plan for the capital of Lower Silesia, but it is worth noting.

It arose rather from the constraints faced by the Polish takeover of post-German lands than from Polish expectations. It turned out that already in autumn 1944, when the Polish Committee for National Liberation (PKWN) in Lublin was considering territorial “compensation” for Poland at the expense of Germany, one of the most important factors that seemed to hinder such a “westward relocation” of the country was the question of population. It was mentioned earlier that Poland had suffered great population losses during the war, weakening its demographic

⁴⁶ Mühle, *Historia Wrocławia*, p. 241.

⁴⁷ Elżbieta Kaszuba, *Miedzy propagandą a rzeczywistością. Polska ludność Wrocławia w latach 1945–1947*, Warszawa–Wrocław 1997, s. 15; Ordyłowski, *Życie codzienne*, pp. 235–247.

⁴⁸ Davies, Moorhouse, *Mikrokosmos*, pp. 451–453; Thum, *Obce miasto*, p. 186.

⁴⁹ Thum, *Obce miasto*, p. 185.

potential to settle new lands⁵⁰. The number of local Poles (original inhabitants) living there could not be overestimated. Pre-war Poland was an agricultural-industrial country in which 60% of the population lived and worked in the countryside⁵¹. In the overall balance, the urban element was not only in the minority, but was also more strongly affected by the wartime tragedies. It should also not be forgotten that in the cities of the Second Republic a significant part of the population was of Jewish and German nationality, and after the war, both these communities could not be taken into account.

As part of the work of the Bureau for Western Territories (BZZ), it was calculated that before the war the urban population of the “Recovered Territories” amounted to 4.1 million people. It was optimistically estimated that the Polish urban population reserves could reach 1,793,000 people, i.e. 43.8% of needs⁵². This optimism was unfounded, so in late May and early June 1945, the plans were modified and it was assumed that 2.5 million Poles would appear in the lands from which it was planned to expulse 7 million Germans. This meant accepting the fact that Poland would not restore the pre-war population density, particularly in the cities, with Wrocław above all. This issue was addressed by Professor Eugeniusz Romer at the First Session of the Scientific Council for the Recovered Territories, organised in Cracow in the summer of 1945. He noted that the destruction of towns in the “new” lands could be favourable to Poland and argued: “if there was a 60% or 70% urban population there, now there will be 30%”, as the ruined towns would not accommodate more anyway⁵³. During this session, Wrocław was discussed and two possible settlement scenarios were considered. In the first one, the city was to be settled in groups, in a compact way, by settlers coming basically from one centre (Lviv) or at most from two (Warsaw). In the second scenario, settlers were to come from all over Poland, selected for their skills, in order to create, as quickly as possible, a new quality – a Polish community of Wrocław⁵⁴. None of these concepts prevailed, and Wrocław took over from Lviv the legend and culture of a borderland city. It was not, however, settled by the planned “professionals” nor by the former inhabitants of Lviv, as it was clearly shown by the case of the 30,000 of them who arrived at the turn of 1945/1946 at the Odra river and later left

⁵⁰ Kaszuba, *Między propagandą*, p. 14.

⁵¹ Wojciech Morawski, *Dzieje gospodarcze Polski*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 215–216.

⁵² Kaszuba, *Między propagandą*, p. 16.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 17.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

in large numbers for central Poland in search of better conditions⁵⁵. Also the people from Warsaw, who had been counted on in the plans as urban settlers, only in small numbers decided to settle in Wrocław, which was not only destroyed almost as much as Warsaw, but was also foreign and “full of Germans”⁵⁶.

Thus, the capital of Lower Silesia was settled, without a plan, by villagers from central Poland. This process, largely spontaneous, did not proceed as quickly as expected, as by the end of 1945 there were still about 30,000 Poles and over 180,000 Germans in the city⁵⁷. The situation resulted not only from problems with reaching the ruined city by rail (until 1946 the Wrocław Main Station was inoperable and instead the suburban Brochów station was used), which slowed down the pace of settling the city⁵⁸. The situation did not change until 1946, when after the Potsdam Agreement sanctioning Polish presence in the new territory, the expulsion of Germans began and new groups of Poles from the lands taken by the Soviet Union began to arrive in Wrocław in railway transports. In the autumn of that year, there were fewer than 30,000 Germans and more than 150,000 Poles. Six months later, only 17,500 of Wrocław’s 214,000 inhabitants were of German nationality⁵⁹.

One of the most important barriers to the reconstruction of the Polish Wrocław as a large city and local metropolis was the issue of employment in the city⁶⁰. In German times it had been a major industrial centre, and this position of the city was legitimised by Linke-Hofmann Werke, which was part of the largest German “metal” concerns. Yet in the spring of 1945, the industry of Wrocław was left in ruins⁶¹. The most valuable machines had already been taken away by the Germans in 1944, the buildings were destroyed in 1945 and what had survived was taken by the Soviets⁶². In these conditions, the restoration of Wrocław as an industrial centre was extremely difficult in 1945. We can find in some studies the opinion that the post-war plans did not include Wrocław as a large industrial city and instead

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 21.

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

⁵⁷ APWr, ZMmW, ref. 64, p. 36

⁵⁸ APWr, ZMmW, ref. 67, pp. 11–12, 18.

⁵⁹ Davies, Moorhouse, *Mikrokosmos*, p. 454.

⁶⁰ Ordyłowski, *Życie codzienne*, pp. 45–50.

⁶¹ Chumiński, *Stan przemysłu*, pp. 57–59.

⁶² When the fighting ended, the Soviets selected 212 Wrocław industrial plants to be dismantled and taken away. Modrawski, *Ziemia Odzyskana*, pp. 93–95; Dolny Śląsk. *Monografia historyczna*, ed. Wojciech Wrzesiński, Wrocław 2006, p. 635.

gave it the role of an administrative and cultural centre⁶³. This, however, was not a planned concept, but a result of the situation after the war. The uncertain status of the “new” territories, and the undoubted needs of the “old” ones, did not encourage the rebuilding of industry in Wrocław. This was to remain the case for several more years and meant that the Polish population arriving here could not count on higher employment⁶⁴. Another barrier to the rebuilding of Wrocław, particularly important at the turn of 1945/1946, was the presence of a large German community in the city, who occupied the surviving houses and flats that the settlers had been deprived of. They saw that the Germans, as professionals, were employed by the Russians, in better (as it was believed) positions, while they, the Poles, often had to do the hardest work⁶⁵.

The presence of Germans, after 5 years of occupation, irritated Poles⁶⁶, and the aversion towards them was significantly strengthened by the relationship that developed between Germans and Russians. It had a practical reason, because German unpaid workers were a valuable labour force for the Soviets and for this reason they were protected from Poles and the Polish administration⁶⁷. In the first period after the capitulation of the Festung on 6th May 1945, Poles arriving in the city in order to settle could either apply to the authorities for a flat or choose their own accommodation, often moving into houses in which their previous occupants were still staying. For the newcomers, the prospect of living together with Germans was difficult to accept⁶⁸. For there was not a family that did not suffer from them during the war.

Other reasons for dislike should also be taken into account, as many Russians found it difficult to show sympathy for the Poles. They often thought that the defeated Germans were a serious adversary and that the Poles, although they had not won the war, were coming for the spoils, and this built up a short-lived alliance of

⁶³ Przemysław Dudek, *Koncepcje odbudowy powojennego Wrocławia 1945–1956 – między miastem prowincjonalnym a drugą metropolią*, “Przegląd Administracji Publicznej”, 2 (2013), p. 61.

⁶⁴ For example, it was not until June 1945 that the Soviets handed over the first 45, already looted industrial enterprises to the Poles. Davies, Moorhouse, *Mikrokosmos*, p. 450. In March 1946, there were 439 people working in industry in Wrocław, and 302 more were needed. APWr, ZMmW, ref. 64, p. 36.

⁶⁵ Ordyłowski, *Życie codzienne*, pp. 46–47.

⁶⁶ Davies, Moorhouse, *Mikrokosmos*, pp. 454–461.

⁶⁷ APWr, ZMmW, ref. 67, p. 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 466–467. Beata Halicka, *Polski Dziki Zachód. Przymusowe migracje i kulturowe osławianie Nadodrza 1945–1948*, Kraków 2015, p. 208.

former enemies⁶⁹. Considering this, it is not surprising that many Wrocław residents were relieved when the forced deportation of Germans began on 1st October 1945⁷⁰. The departure of the Germans from Wrocław did not solve the main problems of the ruined city, apart from the housing issue, as from then on Wrocław could still provide shelter for about 200,000 people. In those post-war years, few new housing units were being built⁷¹, and, in addition, as early as in 1946 a problem with the progressing degradation of the existing substance became evident⁷². As already mentioned, the Three-Year Plan, entering into force in 1947, assumed the primacy of investment in public and communication infrastructure, while the subsequent Six-Year Plan emphasised heavy industry⁷³. At that time, the construction of new housing remained only a distant second. This also applied to Wrocław, which only reached its pre-war population number 40 years after the war⁷⁴.

Many more barriers to the post-war reconstruction and expansion of Wrocław could be mentioned. A large number of them were cumulated in the first months of Polish rule in the city and were typical for the entire “Recovered Territories”. These included problems with transport, which was virtually nonexistent in an organised manner, problems with provisions, typical of lands directly affected by military operations, and threats to life and property resulting from widespread banditry and looting⁷⁵. Most of these were resolved, or at least reduced, over time. However, in the following years the fundamental question remained – would Poland manage to fully utilise the “Recovered Territories” and would Wrocław remain its capital?

As early as 1947, as signalled earlier, an impasse in the rebuilding of Wrocław became evident, and one of the important reasons for this was the natural process of wearing out the social enthusiasm which had enabled many difficult problems to be solved in the first years after the war. The new inhabitants of the capital of

⁶⁹ Thum, *Obce miasto*, pp. 68–74.

⁷⁰ Davies, Moorhouse, *Mikrokosmos*, p. 456.

⁷¹ For example, in 1949 only 453 flats were provided in new buildings in the whole of the “Recovered Territories”. Modrawski, *Ziemie Odzyskane*, p. 498.

⁷² Ordyłowski, *Życie codzienne*, p. 69.

⁷³ Thum, *Obce miasto*, p. 197.

⁷⁴ *Raport z wyników spisów powszechnych województwo dolnośląskie 2002*, Wrocław 2003, I. *Ludność*, <https://wroclaw.stat.gov.pl/publikacje-i-foldery/spisy-powszechne/raport-z-wynikow-woj-dolnoslaskiego-171/i-ludnosc-714/> (access: 14 XII 2019).

⁷⁵ *Dolny Śląsk. Monografia*, pp. 629–636; Ordyłowski, *Życie codzienne*, pp. 76–87, 106–110.

Lower Silesia were already tired of these problems⁷⁶, and their city, still scarred by the war, was increasingly placed in the second “suit” of cities in the country. In 1947 Wrocław was threatened with the fate of playing the role of a provincial town⁷⁷, a threat which became all the more real as the initially vigorous propaganda of the “Recovered Territories” and their “capital” of Wrocław had, by the middle of that year, clearly diminished⁷⁸. This was due to two reasons. Firstly, it was recognised in government circles that Western Pomerania and the port of Szczecin should be distinguished among the new lands, as the culmination of the Oder waterway, linking Silesia and its industrial region with the Polish coast. This shift in socio-political emphasis was evidenced, for example, by the Third Industrial Congress of the Recovered Territories organised in Szczecin, which promoted the idea of making this city the “main port of Central Europe”⁷⁹. The second reason was more serious, as government propaganda began to present the rather correct thesis that further emphasising the distinctiveness of the “new” lands was unfavourable and hindered their integration with the rest of the country. However, instead of continuing to show the “Recovered Territories” as war reparations and an economically valuable gain for the development of the country as its integral part, it was postulated to show them as areas previously deficient in the German economy⁸⁰.

In 1947, despite the stagnation in the process of rebuilding Wrocław, there were also some good signs for the city. The most important of these was the decision taken in the summer of that year to organise the Great Exhibition of the Recovered Territories (WZO) in the city in 1948, for which, in various conceptual forms, the local authorities had been striving since 1945⁸¹. The final decision to organise the WZO in Wrocław was taken in autumn 1947⁸² and this meant that the long-awaited additional funds were directed to the city⁸³. The planned Exhibition was a clear announcement of a change in the authorities’ policy towards Wrocław,

⁷⁶ This fatigue was caused not only by the living situation, but also by the “class struggle” exacerbated by the domestic communists and the social climate associated with it (Kaszuba, *Między propagandą*, pp. 214–266).

⁷⁷ APWr, WDO, ref. 30, p. 70.

⁷⁸ Jakub Tyszkiewicz, *Sto wielkich dni Wrocławia: wystawa Ziem Odzyskanych we Wrocławiu a propaganda polityczna ziem zachodnich i północnych w latach 1945–1948*, Wrocław 1997, pp. 15–54.

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 51–52.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 71–94.

⁸² *Ibidem*, pp. 97 ff.

⁸³ APWr, WDO, ref. 30, pp. 9–23.

which gained a chance to obtain funds from the central budget that would enable the city to rebuild faster⁸⁴. The investments made in Wrocław, especially at the turn of 1947/1948 in connection with the WZO, should also be considered important, from the point of view of rebuilding the city from war damage⁸⁵. Although their traces, like “scars”, were still visible in the city for decades to come⁸⁶.

The organisation of the WZO for the capital of Lower Silesia had mainly a social and future dimension. From this perspective, it is hard to agree with G. Thum’s opinion that, although the WZO was an “important impulse” for the reconstruction of the city, “as soon as the event came to an end, the pace of work clearly slowed down” and “you cannot rather speak of a dynamic process of reconstruction in Wrocław”⁸⁷. On the other hand, following Jakub Tyszkiewicz, it should be stated that even without the Exhibition, a strictly propaganda undertaking, and without the developmental impulse it gave the city, it would have been rebuilt anyway. Wrocław was “destined for revival”⁸⁸, as the capital of the region and a centre with an excellent communications location. However, without the WZO the process of formation of the Polish city and its society would certainly have been slowed down. One might therefore be tempted to say that although 1948 did not bring a permanent return to the idea of rebuilding Wrocław as a great Polish metropolis, it did revive this idea, which was to be very useful in later years⁸⁹, decisively reversing the earlier policy of marginalising the city.

STRESZCZENIE

Wrocław w 1945 r., w wyniku trzymiesięcznych walk o Festung Breslau, zniszczony został w 68%. Miasto było największym na ziemiach niemieckich przyznanych Polsce jako rekompensata wojenna. Jego wartość poważnie obniżyły zniszczenia wojenne. Przybywające do miasta polskie władze musiały sprostać szeregowi problemów. Wiele z nich miało charakter doraźny – dotyczyły bezpieczeństwa, aprowizacji, uruchomienia

⁸⁴ Tyszkiewicz, *Wrocławska Dyrekcja*, p. 430.

⁸⁵ These are well illustrated by the minutes of coordination conferences held during the WDO with extensive participation of other institutions. APWr, UWW, ref. 17.5 XVIII/120, pp. 2–19.

⁸⁶ APWr, WDO, ref. 30, p. 57.

⁸⁷ Thum, *Obce miasto*, p. 197.

⁸⁸ Tyszkiewicz, *Sto wielkich dni*, pp. 149–150.

⁸⁹ Wojciech Wrzesiński, *Metropolia czy prowincja? Wrocław po II wojnie światowej*, “Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka”, 54 (1999), 3, p. 440. He pointed out that it was particularly important that the process of provincialisation of Wrocław, imposed on the city by the central authorities in the late 1940s and early 1950s, was much slower in the minds of its inhabitants. One cannot but connect this with the effects of the WZO.

infrastruktury miejskiej, czy wreszcie koegzystencji wyjeżdżających Niemców z przybywającymi Polakami. Inne towarzyszyć miały historii miasta przez dziesięciolecia. Do najważniejszych wyzwań zaliczyć należy deficyt mieszkań, zniszczenie przemysłu, obcą tożsamością miasta czy wreszcie jego odbudowę i rozbudowę. Jeden jednak problem leżał u podstaw innych – była to kwestia, jakim miastem ma być Wrocław? Lokalnym centrum kultury i administracji Dolnego Śląska, czy też metropolią ziem włączonych do Polski po II wojnie, a więc miastem z pierwszej piątki w RP? Szczególnie ważne dla ukształtowania roli Wrocławia okazały się lata 1945–1947.

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