

INTRODUCTION

Before World War II, Warsaw was called the Paris of the East. The citizens of Warsaw, known for their subtle humor, said, to underline the beauty of their capital, that Paris was the Warsaw of the West.

Both of my parents are from Warsaw and they lived here when WW II erupted in 1939 and for the five following years of Nazi occupation, including the Warsaw Uprising. My father, 11 years old in 1944, as a member of the scouts received orders to join the Warsaw Uprising. Before his scout troop reached the meeting place, the streets were closed by Nazis and he never joined his friends. Many of them were killed and he never got to see them again. My mother's family, after the Uprising failed on October 3, 1944, was forced out, together with all the citizens of Warsaw, to Pruszków, a transitional camp. After staying there for several weeks, they were spread throughout Poland. They left everything behind – their apartment, belongings, furniture and memories of the beautiful city. It was a city with almost 1,300,000 citizens before the War began and right after the Warsaw Uprising only a handful remained living in the ruins. During and after the Uprising, 80% of the city was destroyed in planned and systematic destructions. In modern history it is hard to find another example of a city with almost total destruction. To punish the Warsaw citizens, Himmler decided after the Warsaw Uprising collapsed that, "The city must completely disappear from the surface of the earth and serve only as a transport station for the Wehrmacht. No stone can remain standing. Every building must be razed to its foundation".

My father's family never came back to Warsaw, until my father started to study here many years later. For them there was nothing to come back to. My mother's family, on the other hand, came back to Warsaw after the War ended and took part in the heroic rebuilding of the capital, struggling for everyday life and normality. The attempt to definitely erase the city was not successful and from its disastrous destruction, Warsaw was rebuilt with the effort of a whole nation. However it became a very different city compared to the one it was before not only because of the mass destruction, but also its multicultural character. Before the War, besides Poles there were many Jews (who made up about 30% of Warsaw's

population) Ukrainians, Germans, and Russians formed a colorful picture of the City. After the War they never came back after having escaped from the violence, were forcibly removed from the city, or exterminated in concentration camps. They were replaced by others who came to Warsaw from all over Poland and brought their own cultural heritage, customs and life styles.

The history of rebuilding Warsaw was strongly influenced by different visions within modernist architects from the Office of Rebuilding Warsaw connected to the new communist regime to those who wanted to preserve what was left from the past and reconstruct Warsaw in the pre-war style. Although the communist government underlined the importance of a planned economy, Warsaw is an example of a city which had no comprehensive plan of urban development and was consequently not able to conclude many of the urbanistic plans beside examples such as: Old Town, King's Tract and New Town. Lack of urban planning for many years caused Warsaw to remain a quite chaotic city, which can still be seen today. The communist regime governed the country until 1989, when Poland began the fast transition into a market economy and introduced the key reform for the democratic changes – local government reform.

Warsaw is an example of rebuilding and resilience after a political disaster but also an example of a big success and renaissance in the market economy, after many years of communist administration. This process continues even after 70 years. Poland is the one of the fastest growing economies in Central Europe, and was able to minimize economic crisis undergoing a period of notable growth. This positive economic situation reflects on the development of Warsaw which is the country's political, cultural and economic center. Relatively strong economy, foreign investment and one of the largest stock exchanges in this part of Europe helped Warsaw to develop industry, particularly in high tech area.

However, those fast changes are causing many challenges. One is uneven economic growth, causing differences and disparities within the metropolitan area of the capital of Poland, in regard to wealth distribution, living conditions and education. Another one is lack of a comprehensive urban development policy. Only sixteen percent of the city is covered by the development plan, with increasing housing, transportation, and infrastructure needs. Also the insufficient tax laws governing the taxation of real property has caused Warsaw's comprehensive urban development issues. Additionally, the mass destruction of Warsaw and the course of the reconstruction caused many problems including those of a legal nature. For many years, previous owners and their legal successors, were denied by the communist government rights to claim their property, as well as any compensation. After 27 years from the transition time, the reprivatization has never been regulated in a comprehensive way and no reprivatization law in regard to Warsaw properties is in force.

The focus of the Study Space VIII: Phoenix Cities: Urban Recovery and Resilience in the Wake of Conflict, Crisis and Disaster was to engage in the dis-

cussion among academics, government officials, and urban planners about challenges of the city which raised, developed and adapted to the expanding role of the metropolitan area. Although the history of destruction and rebuilding is unique for Warsaw, particularly because of the scale of the destruction, many cities went through similar paths. Atlanta, Berlin, Dresden, New Orleans are all examples of some of the Phoenix cities “rising from the ashes” and facing similar problems to those of Warsaw.

The authors of the papers prepared in the connection with Study Space VIII discuss a variety of topics which include the necessity for the economic and financial reforms to help cities with problems like those found in Warsaw to overcome certain challenges, issues concerning comprehensive urban planning and social function of the cities in a comparative perspective, European Union law in regard to comprehensive development, and comparison of similar problems concerning urban development in other cities such as Sao Paolo, Barcelona and Atlanta.

We hope you will enjoy this issue of *Studia Iuridica*, which focuses on comparative and international perspective and interdisciplinary approach to metropolitan growth problems.

Ewa Gmurzyńska
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