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Publisher Routledge

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Journal of Urban Design

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713436528>

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To cite this Article Diefendorf, Jeffrey M.(2009) 'Reconstructing Devastated Cities: Europe after World War II and New Orleans after Katrina', Journal of Urban Design, 14: 3, 377 – 397

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13574800903056895

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13574800903056895>

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Reconstructing Devastated Cities: Europe after World War II and New Orleans after Katrina

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ABSTRACT Comparing the post-war reconstruction of bombed German cities and the ongoing rebuilding of New Orleans can provide a useful basis for evaluating what has happened in the Crescent City since Katrina. This article concentrates on reconstruction financing, design ideas, and the planning process. The experience of German reconstruction suggests that expectations in New Orleans for immediate, unrestricted financial help from the Federal government and for constructing a dramatically new city were misplaced. External financing requires time to arrive. Planners after the war and today have drawn upon ideas common throughout the twentieth century. Aided by the Internet and the input of planners and architects from across the United States, the planning process in New Orleans has been comparatively rapid and open. Helped by volunteer labour and charity, actual rebuilding has been as much ad hoc as planned.

In several ways, comparing reconstruction of New Orleans after Katrina and rebuilding the cities destroyed in World War II is irresistible. Why? There are already several good studies comparing New Orleans with American cities damaged in other natural or accidental disasters: Chicago after the fire, San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake or its more recent quake, Galveston and Miami after their hurricanes, and others. So why the comparison with the period after 1945?

One reason is rhetorical. It is common that, when trying to describe natural catastrophes, both victims and observers turn to images of war to spark the imagination, declaring that a damaged town or street looks as if it had been hit by bombs. In reality, it makes a great deal of difference whether structures of stone, brick, or wood are damaged by high explosives and incendiary bombs or by wind, water, or other natural causes, because the agent of destruction largely determines the actual degree of damage and what can be salvaged. Nevertheless, whether or not the analogy is apt, the rhetoric of wartime destruction is found everywhere. For traumatized victims surveying their losses, the distinction between natural and wartime disasters may seem irrelevant. For planners and architects seeking to understand a disaster and guide rebuilding, real differences are important.

Second, the task of rebuilding after a disaster commonly and immediately brings forth reminders of the Marshall Plan, surely the most famous recovery

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'plan' of all, whereby Americans generously donated vast sums to help its former allies and enemies rebuild. For example, Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco, New Orleans Councilwoman Jacquelyn Brechtel Clarkson, and historians Günther Bischof and Douglas Brinkley all called for a Marshall Plan for the Gulf (Warner, 2005). In a sense, the demand for a Marshall Plan is almost a demand for a blank cheque, one that should be promptly delivered by the government and filled in by those impacted by the disaster. It would be wrong to deny the significance and scope of the Marshall Plan. Considering the wartime cost to the United States in lives and resources, the Marshall Plan was an enormous contribution to the post-war world. Precisely because many disaster victims anxiously wait for their own 'Marshall Plan', it is important to understand that the Marshall Plan was in fact not a blank cheque, nor was it central to the rebuilding of cities destroyed in World War II. Post-war reconstruction was financed in many ways, and to focus on the Marshall Plan and what it stands for—the transfer of money—obscures other more relevant comparisons that might be made about post-disaster recovery financing (Warner, 2006; Bischof, 2006).¹

Third, both during and at the end of World War II, citizens, planners, and civic leaders saw the urgent need to rebuild as a golden opportunity to reform or improve cities that before the bombing had been suffering from decay, congestion, and other ailments. The destruction conjured up the image of a *tabula rasa*, upon which rebuilding seemed to offer the possibility of transforming the war-damaged cities according to the latest principles of good urban and architectural design. Indeed, so powerful was this idea of building better cities that many cities undamaged in the war sought to join the reconstruction process (Larkham & Lilley, 2001).² Turning catastrophe into opportunity has also been present in New Orleans. For example, a report titled *New Orleans After the Storm: Lessons from the Past, A Plan for the Future*, issued in October 2005 by the Brookings Institution, declares "that New Orleans *must* be rebuilt, although emphatically *not* the way it was on the even of Hurricane Katrina's landfall" (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2005, p. 2). And *The Times-Picayune* quoted planner Edward Blakely, when appointed to head the reconstruction effort in New Orleans, as saying:

'I was too young to help resurrect Dresden or Berlin after the war,' . . . 'But that's what we're talking about here'. Blakely nonetheless believes that, like those reduced-to-rubble German cities, New Orleans will be reborn as less vulnerable to disaster. But that will require resisting the temptation to merely restore what was lost, rather than to rebuild smarter and better. (*The Times-Picayune (New Orleans)*, 2006)³

In fact, Europe's bombed cities were not blank slates for idealized rebuilding, anymore than the Marshall Plan was a blank cheque provided by the American government to finance rebuilding. In these areas and others, understanding post-war reconstruction and comparison with post-Katrina New Orleans can help both scholars and practitioners better appreciate the challenge of rebuilding the Crescent City (for rebuilding post-war Germany, see Diefendorf, 1993; Durth & Gutschow, 1988; Beyme, 1987; and Beyme *et al.*, 1992).

Financing Reconstruction

The war in Europe ended in early May 1945. Secretary of State George Marshall made his famous speech at Harvard's spring commencement in 1947

(Hogan, 1987; Maier & Bischof, 1991). His proposal took months to get through Congress. Then a plan administration had to be created and compliance with European partners obtained. Marshall Plan funds thus did not really start to flow until late 1948, and most of the money was transferred 4–7 years after the war's end. By that time, urban reconstruction was already well underway. Second, the Marshall Plan was not an altruistic gift without strings attached. It was set up as a loan system and one not intended to rebuild bombed cities but rather to enable Europeans to purchase essential goods, such as food, from the only available supplier: the United States. Only much later were these unpaid loans forgiven, with the monies in some cases going into special banks for reconstruction, where the monies remain today as recirculating funds. (In the case of Germany, those funds have been used to help rebuilding the infrastructure of the former German Democratic Republic after unification in 1990.) Moreover, as preconditions for participating in the Marshall Plan, recipients of Marshall aid had to accept market capitalism, relatively free trade, and multilateral decision-making, the later being an important restriction on national sovereignty.

These preconditions helped provide administrative models for the Common Market, and Marshall aid helped stave off an economic collapse that might have radicalized the population of Western Europe. These were enormous accomplishments, but they had relatively little to do with the direct rebuilding of bombed cities. In Germany, every damaged city pleaded for funding from the occupation forces and then from the newly formed state and national government to pay for physical reconstruction. However, beyond underwriting the purchase of foodstuffs, clothing, and other essentials, Marshall monies primarily helped finance reconstruction of the railroad system, the electrical grid, and the coal industry. Indirectly, this did free up Germany's local and state governments and especially private lenders to support rebuilding damaged cities. Only in 1951 did the Marshall Plan sponsor model housing projects in 15 German cities, but of these only the one in Bremen was in a war-damaged area. Between 1950 and 1952, the Marshall Plan provided around 5% of the financing of housing, and only 1.63% of the total invested in German housing construction between 1950 and 1954 came from the Marshall Plan (Diefendorf, 1993, pp. 143–144).

The Germans had to innovate in order to finance rebuilding. Small property owners borrowed from family members whose property was undamaged. Towns found ways to get not just property owners, but also renters involved in decision-making and financing. In some cities renters contributed to the cost of rebuilding in exchange for very long-term leases at low fixed rates, an approach which amounted to almost quasi-ownership of the rebuilt property. Another important device for gaining resources was 'equalization of burdens' taxes, whereby owners of undamaged property paid one-time taxes to help finance rebuilding of damaged property. In Germany the conditions of war and post-war poverty seem to have suppressed, at least temporarily, old class conflicts and old regional differences, so people were willing to accept this principle of equalizing burdens as just (Hughes, 1999). One manifestation of this was the massive construction of so-called 'social housing', subsidized apartments occupied by members of the working and middle classes, both of which were in need after the war.

In short, as a model for rebuilding New Orleans, the Marshall Plan has its limits. The experience of the post-war years suggests that allocating and dispersing federal aid takes considerable time, and it may best be directed at major infrastructure improvements, not rebuilding individual houses and

businesses. That donors keep strings attached is normal. There is no reason to think that, just because there was a disaster, getting residents and decision-makers in each ward, parish, city, state, and federal agency to agree and work closely and quickly together on the distribution of large sums of money will be easy (Heintel, 2007). That was certainly not the case in post-war Europe. If post-war Europe offers a lesson here, depending upon, and calling for, immediate, massive unrestricted federal aid in an American Marshall Plan for New Orleans diverted attention from what could be accomplished both through prompt action by local planning offices and spontaneous rebuilding initiatives by private citizens. Both were crucial for reconstruction after 1945, and neither depended upon funding from sources outside the community.

A great deal of criticism has been directed toward the federal government for the slow delivery of aid to the victims of Katrina, and surely both the executive and legislative branches could have acted more swiftly, equitably, and effectively (Cross, 2009). The task, however, was both enormous and complicated. The state of Louisiana launched the Road Home Program in February 2006 to support the rebuilding of housing. Federal funding was approved in July 2006, and through January 2009, three years and five months after the hurricane, over US\$7.6 billion has been distributed to some 121 000 applicants, with the average award being US\$63 061 (Road Home, 2009). The firm ICF International of Fairfax, Virginia, was hired to manage the programme, with Donald Powell serving as the federal coordinator and Sean Reilly representing the Louisiana Recovery Authority (LRA). Sensitive to complaints, the ICF has noted that it hired over 2000 people, developed administrative procedures, and created customer service centres throughout the Gulf Coast area to process the aid applications fairly and without fraud (ICF International, 2009). At least in terms of timing, the Marshall Fund did not do any better.

The Road Home was not the only vehicle for financing rebuilding. Some property owners received insurance payments. The LRA created a Louisiana Small Rental Program that has sought, with limited success, to assist small landlords. Federal tax credits were authorized to support rebuilding and renovating historic structures. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has provided funding for rebuilding the city's infrastructure. The Army Corps of Engineers took on the reconstruction and improvement of the levee system. A great deal remains to be done, and everyone will need to be creative to find the money necessary to move forward.

Designing and Planning a New and Better City

The damage sustained by New Orleans was perhaps the greatest ever experienced by an American city. Forty-four per cent of the metropolitan population lived in the flood zone; 86% lived in areas suffering some sort of damage. Forty-one per cent of businesses in metropolitan New Orleans were in the flood zone and 45% of the housing units were flooded (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2005, pp. 13–14). In what became West Germany, where virtually every city had been destroyed in the war, the degree of destruction varied, but it was also enormous. In West German cities that had contained over 100 000 people before war, the destruction rate was around 50%. In Würzburg it reached 89%, in Hamburg 75%. Around 45% of the housing stock in West Germany had been totally destroyed or badly damaged. The damage was also concentrated, in the sense that most often centres of towns had been hit worst, with newer suburbs

more or less spared. This meant that the impact on socio-economic classes differed: dense, often old and substandard, working-class housing suffered badly. Furthermore, voluntary and mandatory evacuations meant that the centres of the bombed cities were relatively depopulated at the war's end.

While actual reconstruction did not begin until after the war ended, the bombed cities could draw upon a very rich background of town planning. Already during the war, private citizens, city planning offices, and centrally directed planning offices began work on systems for inventories of damage, procedures for rubble clearance, and actual reconstruction plans.⁴ For the latter they drew upon pre-war proposals for garden cities, the modernist visions of CIAM, and National Socialist plans to redesign most large cities to reflect Nazi ideals. Thus, these reconstruction plans could incorporate ideas about functional zoning, green belts and new parks, high-rise housing blocks, roadways for growing motor vehicle traffic, revitalized neighbourhoods of 5000–10 000 inhabitants, and monumental axes and buildings to shape or represent the identity of a city (Figures 1 and 2). There were also ideas about how to mitigate the consequences of future air raids, such as building broad, straight streets to facilitate both evacuations and fire fighting (Diefendorf, 2009). At this point town planning and architecture were not considered separate professions. Professional planners saw themselves engaged in *Städtebau*, or 'city-building', something that combined three-dimensional urban design and social engineering.

Because many densely populated inner-city neighbourhoods had been destroyed, and because large parts of the population had been relocated to the countryside to escape the bombing, it was possible to view reconstruction planning as a kind of social engineering, whereby returning citizens would live and work within the redesigned city, but not necessarily where they had lived before. In these plans, the working class was not to return to their tenements, but

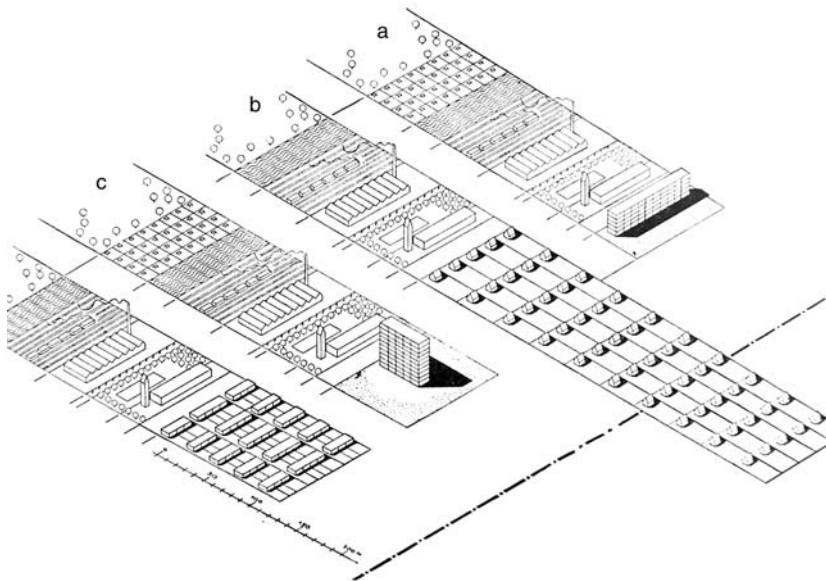


Figure 1. Design for a model settlement with mixed forms of housing, public services, industry and truck gardens. Source: Göderitz et al. (1957, p. 37).

Aryanized properties were sometimes used as civic buildings or sites for new housing.

Clearly, both class (or better, poverty) and race also played a central role in the destruction in New Orleans and continue to play a role in reconstruction design (Hartman & Squires, 2006). In the 1930s, the city built racially segregated public housing projects. In the 1950s and 1960s, when federally funded projects bolstered seawalls of Lake Pontchartrain, drained marshes, and built new freeways, suburban housing development encouraged white flight out of the city centre to areas such as Lakeview on the lake's south shore and St. Tammany parish to the north (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2005; Campanella, 2007; Fussell, 2007). Middle-class blacks replaced whites in Gentilly and also moved to a new suburban subdivision in Pontchartrain Park, both in low-lying areas (Reese & Wolff, 2008). Neighbourhoods like the Lower Ninth Ward, also susceptible to flooding, became both overwhelmingly black and suffered from high rates of poverty, low educational achievement, substandard housing, and high crime rates. Before Katrina, then, New Orleans was characterized by areas of racial near-homogeneity and concentrated poverty (Germany, 2007; Hirsch, 2007). The damage caused by the hurricane was the worst in the low-lying areas, and both poor and middle-class black people suffered the greatest losses. They also constituted the greatest number of evacuees. The combination of sweeping damage and depopulation encouraged both politicians and planners to dream of redesigning these areas. As one politician remarked, "We finally cleaned up public housing in New Orleans. We couldn't do it, but God did" (Long, 2007, p. 796).

Very few of the wartime plans for German cities were actually implemented after the war. Some planners and plans were tainted by their ties to Nazism. Planners who drew up reconstruction plans for one city during the war commonly moved to take jobs in other cities after the war.⁵ What is important is that there was on hand a large cohort of experienced planners ready and anxious to guide the reconstruction process, and they badly wanted the work. They exchanged ideas through correspondence, key professional publications, conferences, and with the help of organizations like the German Association of Cities (Durth, 1986).

The most radical, visionary reconstruction plans proved impractical and unpopular. These included suggestions for abandoning large parts of bombed cities and starting over in new locations. Initial plans for Berlin (by Hans Sharoun's 'collective') and Mainz (by the French modernist Marcel Lods), for example, paid little attention to their historic cores and instead conceived them as modernist, ribbon cities. Such plans foundered for several reasons. First, cost. The still-extant investment in infrastructure (streets, utilities above and underground, rail lines) and in repairable buildings was far too great to abandon when the city treasuries were empty. Second, planning law was not strong enough to enable enforced large-scale restructuring of private property. Third, except in those cities bombed at the very end of the war, ad-hoc reconstruction along old property lines was already underway and not easily reversed. Fourth, many beloved major monuments, such as churches or civic buildings, were still standing and repairable if damaged. And fifth, much of the public clung to the memories of the historic cities, memories which had shaped civic and individual identity. When the war ended, people streamed back to their old cities, even if those cities and their former homes were in ruins, because they had no place else to go. With virtually all cities badly damaged and having worn out their welcome in the

countryside, evacuated urban dwellers returned home as quickly as possible. Visionary reconstruction plans could not sweep these matters aside.

In New Orleans too there have been radical proposals to relocate all or parts of the city, leaving some destroyed areas as memorial parklands. For example, Kenneth Foster and Robert Giegengack argued that “The only rational long-term solution to the future of New Orleans would be to relocate the city and its many vital functions to a safer location ...” (Foster & Giegengack, 2006, p. 55). The reasoning has been quite rational. Huge new storms are highly likely, sea levels are rising, and the Mississippi may well someday change its course, defying the efforts of engineers to control it. Environmental mitigation plans depending upon new levees and elevated housing will therefore not suffice. These proposals have been rejected for the same reasons that visionary relocation plans for German cities were rejected: the value of existing investments, an inadequate legal framework to transform property rights, an unwillingness to reverse ad hoc repairs, the existence of the relatively undamaged historic landmarks like the French Quarter and Garden District, and the widespread public desire to rebuild the city in the pre-Katrina form with which most citizens identified (Kusky, 2005; Vale, 2005). There is one difference from Germany, however. While a consistent theme in public discourse since Katrina has been the right of all displaced citizens to return, in fact many of those who left the city have not come back, having found new homes and jobs in other states, other parts of Louisiana, or in the undamaged suburbs of metropolitan New Orleans.

In West Germany it usually took several years to develop reconstruction plans and gain both political and public support and another five to ten years to realize those plans. This is not surprising. During the first post-war years there was no national government, inflation was very high, financing was lacking, and the black market economy could not overcome the crushing shortage of building materials and equipment. Nevertheless, by the late 1950s planners stopped talking about reconstruction and instead spoke in terms of normal, on-going planning and building. By that point the rubble was mostly gone, most public buildings restored, reconstructed, or replaced, and the post-war housing shortage solved.

A small number of smaller cities, such as Freudenstadt and Rothenburg ob der Tauber, opted to try to rebuild more or less as they had been before, retaining narrow streets and restoring picturesque buildings and squares. In part this was to recreate local cultural identity, in part to attract tourists. Some mid-sized cities, like Nuremberg, Münster, and Lübeck, took the path of adaptive restoration for their central areas, which meant keeping most of the old street grid, rebuilding major religious and civic monuments, and then requiring other rebuilt buildings to fit in with the traditional cityscape in terms of building materials, colours, building height, and so on. New housing blocks went up on broader streets outside the core city. Most large cities sought to modernize. Important historic buildings were reconstructed or restored, and sometimes a single street or small district was rebuilt as the ‘old city’, but otherwise reconstruction followed what were considered the best modern design principles. Modern architecture was encouraged, streets were widened for auto traffic, new apartment blocks, aligned to maximize light and fresh air, were put up to replace the old. New zoning laws aimed to delineate separate areas for industry, housing, recreation, commerce, and culture. Here Frankfurt, Hannover, and Düsseldorf are good examples. The new Düsseldorf not only featured skyscrapers, but also boasted a new freeway into the heart of the city. Starting in the 1960s, after this primary phase of reconstruction

had ended, critics of the prevailing models of urban form redirected German planning toward valuing compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly neighbourhoods in or close to the city centres. This trend has meliorated the modernist thrust that had characterized rebuilding the larger cities.

The Planning and Design Process

The ability of planners to turn urban design into reality has depended upon both the creation of suitable models and on the effectiveness of the planning process. In post-war Germany, the process of reconstruction planning varied from city to city, as one would expect in an area first divided into distinct occupation zones ruled by powers with quite different ideas about centralized decision-making and then organized into a federal nation-state that granted significant autonomy to states and cities. That said, the greatest responsibility was normally assumed by the city planning office, which worked simultaneously on a town master plan and on plans for damaged areas. Planning offices laboured mightily, though often understaffed and lacking key maps and essential data, such as records of property ownership, because such materials had been destroyed in the bombing. Many property owners or lease holders were also missing, complicating efforts to redraw property lines to form parcels better suited to rebuilding. The German cities often already owned considerable land, so they sought to encourage land exchanges to facilitate property realignments. Otherwise they encouraged creation of block-sized rather than city-wide rebuilding corporations. German planners sought, but did not always obtain, legal powers to transfer land owned by individuals who were missing, or unable or unwilling to rebuild, to individuals or companies prepared to rebuild. The new general master plans usually incorporated current ideas about zoning, the rebuilding plans incorporated current ideas about building codes and standards. In some cases there were design competitions, though often restricted to local architects in the expectation that a rebuilt area would thereby reflect knowledge of a local sense of place.

Since most reconstruction planners had come of age during the crisis years of the Weimar Republic and the authoritarian era of National Socialism, they would have preferred a system that would have allowed them to impose their plans upon their cities. However, since the spirit of democracy implied the need for some public participation and support, planners reached out to the citizenry in different ways. In some cities like Cologne there were public forums to discuss reconstruction plans. In Berlin and Düsseldorf planners presented the plans in public exhibitions. Perhaps the most successful of the post-war planners, Rudolf Hillebrecht, gained public support for his plans for rebuilding Hannover through a long sequence of block meetings between property owners, renters, and planners, where he managed to persuade property owners to work voluntarily with the planning office to redraw property lines or consolidate properties to facilitate rebuilding along the lines desired by his office (Figures 3 and 4).

When we turn to reconstruction planning for New Orleans, we can find both similarities and differences with the situation in post-war Germany. One area where the New Orleans planning experience is quite different from Germany's is the extent of proposals from outside the city planning department. In the German case, since nearly every city had been bombed, planners had more than enough to do on their own turf. After Katrina, planners and architects from all over the



Figure 3. Hannover destroyed. Source: Durth & Gutschow (1988, p. 731).

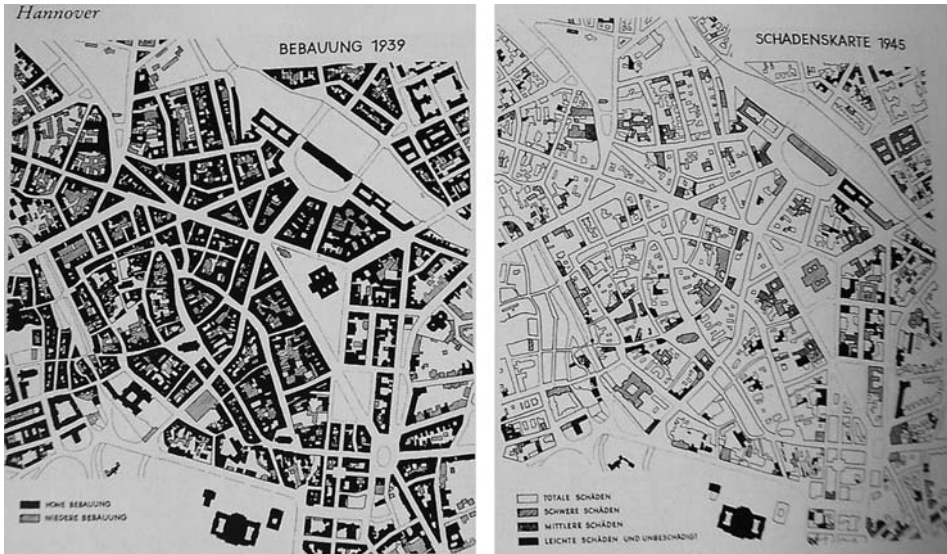


Figure 4. Hannover inner city pre-war and damage map. Source: Durth & Gutschow (1988, p. 728).

United States and some from abroad jumped in to offer opinions on relocation, mitigation, building codes, architectural style, priorities, and planning procedures. While expressing concern that the architectural profession was being left out, the American Institute of Architects by November 2005 had registered 600 offers from members to do pro bono work in New Orleans. There were also offers of help from the World Monuments Fund and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The American Institute of Architects (AIA) also collaborated with Tulane's School of Architecture in a quickly staged competition to design new

forms of individual housing and new housing projects to replace damaged housing (American Institute of Architects, 2005a, 2005b).

At the same time in November 2005, the American Planning Association, working with the College of Urban and Public Affairs of the University of New Orleans, produced a study of the planning process in New Orleans. It paid particular attention to such issues as adequate staffing of the central City Planning Committee, the need for a finished master plan and adequate mechanisms to apply and enforce that plan as a broad guide to reconstruction, the importance of planning at the neighbourhood level that would involve local residents, and the need for a new reconstruction law that could facilitate property realignments and guide actual construction. This study made both short and long term recommendations. It noted, for instance, that variance procedures for historic buildings should be included in both flood mitigation ordinances and in actual recovery plans. Streamlining issues of reconstruction permits was necessary, but fees needed to be deferred to get things going. Longer term recommendations included encouraging greater density, mixed-use and income developments, a new light-rail system, and new parks and green spaces (American Planning Association's New Orleans Planning Assessment Team, 2005). Virtually all these proposals can be found in planning proposals after 1945, as German planners also wanted to reduce population densities in central areas and encourage building new housing projects on vacant land.

Academics around the country and not just from Tulane and the University of New Orleans joined in, seeing New Orleans both as an opportunity to provide real help and as a kind of laboratory for study. Tulane's School of Architecture and the Netherlands' Architectural Institute collaborated in producing by February 2006 an exhibit of proposals from renowned firms for both rebuilt districts and new buildings (Sterling, 2006). The Tulane School of Architecture has also made rebuilding the city a central feature of its effort to recruit new students. Its advertising poster proclaims: "you have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make the rebuilding of this iconic city a part of your studies". The University of Pennsylvania organized two major conferences in December 2005 and February 2006 that brought together scholars in several disciplines to offer opinions on rebuilding. Two important books were quickly published, both with the subtitle '*Lessons from Hurricane Katrina*' (Daniels *et al.*, 2006; Birch & Wachter, 2006). Many of the essays sought to make comparisons with earlier disaster recoveries and explored problems of leadership, definitions of historic preservation, principles of mitigation zoning and growth management, and so on. Scholars at Brown University had geared up by spring 2006 to offer studies that combined sociological examinations of race and class with concepts of both social and environmental sustainability (Logan, 2006; Brunsma *et al.*, 2008; Department of Architecture, University of Kansas, 2007).

Such a cornucopia of ideas and concentration of expertise for a single city could not have been matched in early post-war Germany, when travel was restricted, professional journals and associations were only slowly being reformed, universities only gradually reviving. In New Orleans, the problem became how to channel these ideas and come up with a workable plan for rebuilding the city. To date, three planning enterprises have been officially sanctioned by the city of New Orleans: the Bring New Orleans Back plan (BNOB), the so-called Lambert Plans (New Orleans Neighborhood Revitalization [or Rebuilding] Plans), and the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP) (Horne & Nee,

2006). Operating on the periphery, but in principle controlling of the flow of state and federal funding to New Orleans and other damaged towns, has been the Louisiana Redevelopment Authority (LRA).

The Bring New Orleans Back Commission was announced by Mayor Ray Nagin on the last day of September 2005, a month after the hurricane hit. Its 'Urban Planning Committee', chaired by developer Joseph Canizaro, oversaw subcommittees on historic preservation, housing, infrastructure, land use, sustainability, and urban design, with the last-named chaired by Reed Kroloff, the dean of Tulane's School of Architecture. The commission quickly hired the Urban Land Institute to prepare a preliminary study, which it submitted in mid-November. The BNOB 'Action Plan for New Orleans: The New American City', was submitted to the Mayor on 11 January 2006 (Bring New Orleans Back, 2006; Barnett & Beckman, 2006, pp. 288ff.).

Most of the recommendations are unsurprising, since they resemble core recommendations for urban design found already in Germany in 1945 and other damaged cities and ideas that have served as leitmotifs of urban planning more generally for half a century. The plan stressed rebuilding and reinvigorating the downtown and the neighbourhoods, building new parks and green spaces, creating a modern light rail transit system, and maintaining those institutions which embodied the city's intellectual capital. It included flood and storm protection and preservation of historic structures. Rebuilding should first focus on 'immediate opportunity areas', like downtown, which had suffered little damage, and on developing vacant or under-utilized property for new housing and other kinds of infill.

The action plan called for neighbourhoods of from 5000 to 10 000 residents, with neighbourhood-level planning to include residents, professionals, and former residents clearly committed to return. In badly damaged areas there was to be a moratorium on construction until thorough planning was complete, a strategy also used in some post-war German cities. The implementation of new plans for these devastated parts of the city would require redrawing property lines and acquiring property for development through eminent domain. This would require creation of a New Orleans Recovery Corporation with new, legislated "powers to receive and expend redevelopment funds, to implement the redevelopment plan, [and] to buy and sell property." The New Orleans Recovery Corporation should be an independent body governed by highly qualified individuals and should have a ten-year life span—a time frame that corresponds well to German reconstruction.

In addition, for the city to emerge "bigger and better", the BNOB called for a new master plan, greater legal authority for the City Planning Commission, new zoning codes, and a "design review commission". Neighbourhood-level planning should begin immediately, and if the Recovery Corporation could obtain federal and foundation funding, plan approvals and actual rebuilding could begin in June.

While some, such as the American Society of Landscape Architects (2006), supported the BNOB plan, others criticized it strongly. Since predominantly black areas were the most heavily damaged, the building moratorium and proposals to turn some damaged areas into green spaces seemed aimed unfairly at that racial group, and the Mayor rejected these ideas. Rather than, as it proclaimed, building a city "bigger and better", in fact the new designs suggest both more compact neighbourhoods and a much reduced population, which implied that many

former residents would not or should not return (Glaeser, 2006). There was insufficient coordination with FEMA and state authorities, which jeopardized funding. The planning process appeared to some to be too political. Nevertheless, producing this action plan was remarkably quick work, given the terrible condition of the city, and most of the proposals made sense. There could not be action, however, without the backing of the public and the politicians, and both denounced the BNOB plan.

That said, the next logical step was the preparation of detailed neighbourhood rebuilding plans, and in April 2006 the City Council engaged Paul Lambert of Miami and Sheila Danzey of New Orleans for this purpose. By September, 48 'Lambert' plans were completed, and they were accepted by the City Council in October. These 20–30-page documents included analyses of each area according to such factors as income, age cohort, transportation usage, and land use. Each contained damage maps, a funding matrix for rebuilding, and specific rebuilding proposals. For example, the proposals for the Lower Ninth Ward called for substantial redrawing of street and property lines, new green areas, and new forms of architecture, all of which would change the character of that ward (Lambert & Danzey, 2006b). The neighbourhood planning teams held 84 public meetings, including meetings in Houston, Atlanta, and Baton Rouge, and some 7500 residents participated (Lambert & Danzey, 2006a).

Like the BNOB Action Plan, the Lambert plans have been criticized. It is true that, in respect to the planning process, they did not have prior approval of the Louisiana Redevelopment Authority and were developed independent of the City Planning Commission, and by the time Lambert and Danzey began work, it was probably clear that the BNOB plan was going nowhere because it lacked funding. Indeed, the Mayor, City Council, and LRA had agreed upon still another level of planning, the Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP), in July 2006. On the other hand, it does seem that Lambert and Danzey were following the recommendation of the BNOB to prepare neighbourhood-level plans and hence felt little need to prepare them as if they constituted a coherent city master plan, since that would presumably come elsewhere (Horne & Nee, 2006, pp. 7–8). And if the Lambert plans did not win universal approval in each neighbourhood, the preparation of these plans in five months was a considerable accomplishment.

Even before the Lambert Plans had been drafted, the third effort at official planning began. In July 2006, the Mayor, City Council, and LRA agreed to support the UNOP. The LRA wanted comprehensive planning free of local political influence for the entire city, not just the damaged areas, before it would cooperate in releasing state and federal funding. This was the trump card. The LRA would not give the Mayor, the BNOB plan, or the neighbourhood planning programme its support. The Rockefeller Foundation contributed several million dollars, channelled through the Greater New Orleans Foundation, to pay for a new approach. The Greater New Orleans Foundation created the New Orleans Community Support Foundation to administer the money, and this foundation in turn hired a local firm (Concordia) to set things in motion. Contracts were awarded to five private planning firms to conduct neighbourhood and district planning and ten firms for neighbourhood planning. Six local firms won contracts; the rest went to firms from Boston, New York, St Louis, Columbia Maryland, Atlanta, Tampa, Miami, Philadelphia, and Charlottesville. Notable among the outside firms was Duany Plater-Zyberk, the doyens of the New Urbanism. (Duany Plater-Zyberk was already involved in rebuilding plans in Mississippi and had

a contract with the LRA to advise on neighbourhood planning.) A local firm was contracted to pull everything together into a unified plan by January 2007. This was also called a unified plan because the new planning teams were supposed to build upon the efforts of the BNOB and the Lambert neighbourhood planning process.

Moreover, on 4 December 2006, the city named Edward Blakely as the Executive Director of its newly created Office of Recovery Management—in other words, he was hired to put the unified plan into action by obtaining the promised billions of federal dollars. Blakely was an interesting choice. Then Chair of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Sydney, he had been a planning advisor after the Loma Pieta earthquake in San Francisco, the Oakland hills fires, and 9/11 in New York. Before going to Sydney, he had chaired planning departments at Berkeley and then the University of Southern California. He had also run unsuccessfully against Jerry Brown for the office of Mayor of Oakland. He is an African-American with wide planning and political experience, but one untainted by local New Orleans politics. Already in September 2005 he had said that “we will have to ... provide the hope and the plan to rebuild [New Orleans] near or almost exactly as it was originally”, something that obviously appealed to those from the devastated parts of the city (Blakely, 2005). But he could also talk about rebuilding a smaller, denser city based on neighbourhood planning, land swaps, and private investment. Blakely’s appointment clearly represents an effort by the Mayor and City Council to retain (or regain) control of the rebuilding process, rather than cede it to entirely independent agencies or a rebuilding corporation.

At the point that the UNOP was nearly complete, its sponsors sought to solidify public support by staging what were called ‘Community Congresses’, three events where New Orleans residents in a meeting hall but also displaced residents in Houston, Dallas, and Atlanta via the internet could discuss the plans. Public comment was also solicited within the neighbourhoods and, once the UNOP was published, at a City Hall meeting in March 2007 (Unified New Orleans Plan (UNOP), 2007b). This was all in addition to neighbourhood meetings that were part of the Lambert neighbourhood plans which were completed in October. It is not clear to what degree these myriad meetings complemented or conflicted with each other, but this degree of public participation far exceeds the levels of public participation in post-war Germany, leaving aside the numbers of Germans who viewed reconstruction plans when mounted in public exhibitions.

Most of the ideas in the 600-page UNOP are not exceptional. It is interesting that the opening sentences of the ‘Executive Summary’ of the ‘Citywide Strategic Recovery and Rebuilding Plan’, a part of the March 2007 UNOP, state:

The United States has been fortunate to have had very few large-scale urban calamities or warfare on its soil. But this also means that we have limited institutional knowledge of how to reconstruct our modern urban fabric after it has sustained catastrophic levels of devastation. (UNOP, 2007b)

The plan’s authors evidently felt little need to consider what might be learned from rebuilding after 1945. Because the UNOP is supposed to be a comprehensive plan for the entire city, it contains many elements that one can find in normal plans for undamaged cities everywhere as well as for damaged cities. For example, it recommends construction of sound deflecting walls along the interstate

highways, encouraging economic development, renovation of existing parks and marinas, expansion of the airport and the revitalization of 'urban corridors and nodes' to strengthen cultural centres (UNOP, 2007b, pp. 3.34, 3.66). The UNOP did attempt to prioritize the many recovery projects, dividing them into short (2007–2008), mid (2009–2011), and long-term (2012–2016) projects, though these are largely driven by what was considered practical rather than reaching for an ideal or model city. At points the plan is deliberately vague, calling, for example, for the study of 'alternative mechanisms' to acquire land for reconstruction, and the plan admits that the power to implement any reconstruction plans is beyond the mandate of the plan's creators. The timetable, however, comes rather close to what happened in Germany.

Perhaps more innovative or radical are the plans for individual neighbourhood and districts because they embody principles that are potentially contradictory. On the one hand, the UNOP states categorically that "Every resident has the right to return to New Orleans. All neighbourhoods in the City will be rebuilt" (UNOP, 2007b, p. 17). On the other hand, the plan stresses that the essential point is to create stable, sustainable neighbourhoods "by concentrating community services and commercial activity in areas of higher elevation, offering incentives to residents/business owners and developers to relocate into a more clustered development". In heavily damaged, high-risk areas, however, "any programs or projects ... must be strictly voluntary and incentive-based; no mandatory relocation programs are proposed" (UNOP, 2007b, pp. 58, 67). Will residents be allowed to return to high-risk, unsustainable, unclustered neighbourhoods? The UNOP declined "specifically [to] identify areas of town—by name or by map—where it recommends that public investment be minimized until certain criteria are met" (UNOP, 2007b, p. 19).

The 31-page chapter of the UNOP's "Framework for Sustainable Resilience in the Lower Ninth Ward: Vision, Goals & Principles," is illustrative. This, of course, is the predominantly black, low-income neighbourhood now famous for the massive damage caused by the flooding and for the very slow rate of recovery. On the one hand, the vision and principles contain nothing but high-minded ideas that could be applied to any neighbourhood anywhere, and many were present in post-war Germany. Restorable buildings, especially those of some historic value, should be rebuilt. Since the architectural style in each New Orleans neighbourhood differed, a 'pattern book' should be provided so that new construction can adapt to neighbourhood architectural traditions. New housing should fill in vacant spaces. There should be public and affordable housing, giving both owners and former renters the right to return. There should be a full range of community facilities, including educational opportunities beyond high school. Infrastructure should be modernized and hardened, and rebuilding should enable the area to withstand future floods. There should be mass transit, parks, pedestrian walkways, community-based businesses. The neighbourhood should be crime free. The neighbourhood should be economically, culturally, and ecologically or environmentally sustainable. What is not to like here?

But how is this to be done? The plan suggests creating a Community Development Corporation and a Community Land Trust, both led by neighbourhood residents, to obtain and manage funding and reconstruction. The land trust would take land off the market, preclude speculation, and facilitate consolidation and parcel exchanges. Local control and leadership would empower the residents to build a newer and better Lower Ninth.

Only time will tell if this strategy proves workable. If not enough people return, if new management institutions are not formed, and if funding does not flow, it will not work. In terms of planning processes, something of interest in this plan is the attention given to possible 'resources', meaning not funding but models found in other towns across the country and in a large number of websites. Most of these refer to projects or ideals developed for towns not damaged in a disaster—such as Portland, Oregon. Some seem strangely inappropriate. The document highlights the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, for example. The resources, whether in terms of funding or expertise, available in Manhattan are hardly comparable with one of the poorest urban neighbourhoods in New Orleans. Moreover, the speed with which the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation has not rebuilt the relatively small site destroyed on 9/11 can hardly reassure the citizens of New Orleans.

There is another significant implementation problem built into the UNOP. The planning process, as noted above, stressed extensive community and neighbourhood involvement. Actual implementation is also supposed to rest on the shoulders of neighbourhood residents, even though the Mayor has hired a high-profile planner (Blakely) and created a new office to manage rebuilding. For example, the plan for District 8, the Lower 9th, states:

Funding & Implementation: The Lower Ninth Ward residents, through accountable civic and neighborhood leaders, will oversee, maintain and utilize the necessary transparent funding streams from public mitigation funds, capital campaigns and private programs in order to repair, rehabilitate, and re-vision their future. The community will act as a single advocacy and coordinating entity to ensure that multiple sources of funds are accessed and available for various recovery projects and community improvements as well as developing sufficient programs and entities implement such improvements. All projects and programs should be responsive and facilitate responsible and sustainable private investment. (UNOP, 2007a)

Thus, it remains to be seen just how principles like clustered neighbourhoods, a universal right of return, and neighbourhood implementation will be carried through by the Office of Recovery Management as detailed plans are completed, funds found and allocated, and contracts and building permits issued. In the case of Germany after 1945, successful implementation of rebuilding depended much more upon persuasive leadership from the chief city planner than upon leadership from below. Meanwhile, in New Orleans ad-hoc, individually driven rebuilding outside these planning processes continues—just as it did in the bombed cities after World War II.

Reconstruction outside of the planning process was in fact an essential element of post-war urban recovery everywhere in Europe and Japan. And obviously such individually driven, unplanned rebuilding is taking place in New Orleans, whether or not in compliance with the FEMA elevation guidelines. New Orleans reporter Jed Horne noted in July 2006 that Mayor Ray "Nagin certainly is not alone in his support for a willy-nilly approach to recovery" (Horne, 2006). *The Times-Picayune* reported in January 2007 on "the patchwork quality of New Orleans' recovery", and in July 2007 *The New York Times* observed: "All over the city, a giant slow-motion reconstruction project is taking place. It is unplanned, fragmentary and for the isolated individuals carrying it out, often overwhelming" (Horne, 2006;

Russell & Russell, 2007; Nossiter, 2007). If it took a decade or more to rebuild Europe's bombed cities, it will be years before it is clear whether the new New Orleans is the result of planned or unplanned reconstruction.

Conclusion: Histories as Prologues for Reconstruction

Whereas most scholars, commentators, and practitioners of urban design have made reference to the recovery from previous natural disasters in American history, broadening the perspective to include rebuilding cities after World War II can provide different ways of understanding the challenges faced in New Orleans and reaching a more realistic assessment of the recovery effort. This survey of reconstruction planning in post-war Germany and post-Katrina New Orleans has brought to light a number of telling similarities and differences.

Hurricane victims and those hoping to shape reconstruction longed for an immediate blank cheque and in many cases dreamed of a blank slate upon which to construct quickly a better and improved city, but the experience of post-war Germany, where destruction was equally vast and where money, building supplies, and labour were initially in short supply, shows that this was most unlikely. Large-scale, external funding is normally slow to arrive, and strings are normally attached. It has always taken considerable time to work out the coordination of neighbourhood, city, state, and national authorities. It also takes time to produce models of reconstruction that can enjoy public support and to develop workable administrative structures to manage funding and oversee rebuilding. The interests and priorities of all stakeholders (groups identified by race or class, historic preservationists, churches, universities, businesses, neighbourhoods) are often different and not easily reconciled.

That does not of course mean that obstacles cannot be overcome. Just as Germans in 1945 could draw upon a wide variety of models for rebuilding, so can architects and planners in New Orleans. A profusion of plans for rebuilding New Orleans was generated quite quickly—in just two years after Katrina. Reconstruction planning in Germany was no faster. Since the planning process in New Orleans has involved so many proposals from citizens and professionals and has gone through three levels of officially sanctioned planning, it is not surprising that the Unified Plan, in seeking to integrate all prior efforts, tends more toward homogenization than innovation. The primary phase in rebuilding Germany's cities took a decade or more, with some rebuilding guided by planners but some the result of the initiative of individual property owners. That will surely be the case in New Orleans.

The three years of rebuilding were years of great hardship in Germany, as they have been in New Orleans. As ruins in Germany were cleared, returning city residents built make-shift dwellings in the rubble. As of August 2008, three years after Katrina, New Orleans could claim 72% of the households and 87% of the population compared with the pre-Katrina level. Most heavily damaged buildings have been removed. In spite of much rebuilding, however, some 65 000 blighted properties or empty building lots remain. Moreover, many returning residents have joined a shift from the low-lying and mostly flooded areas to the areas that suffered relatively little flooding (Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, 2008, pp. 6–14). Such shifts will have a major impact on the survival of many schools, businesses, and churches, just as was the case in Germany.

There are, however, some truly interesting and unusual features about rebuilding New Orleans. No German city could call upon a comparable degree of external help. Models for reconstruction had been produced during the war, and German planners were aware of these and the methods used in producing them, but so many cities had been damaged that professional expertise was dispersed, not concentrated on a single city. German cities could not count on massive reconstruction funding from external sources. New Orleans will receive billions of federal dollars. But beyond this, New Orleans has been able to draw upon donated funds, building materials, and labour from all over the United States (Powell, 2007, p. 873). These have gone mostly into small projects, such as rebuilding individual homes, and these projects have often stood apart from the larger planning process. For example, by the end of 2008, Habitat for Humanity's (2009) thousands of volunteers had built more than 1000 homes in the Gulf Coast. In post-war Germany, because nearly all cities had been destroyed and the economy and polity were in disarray, there was no comparable wave of charity to help rebuild.

The existence of the internet has not only made an unparalleled amount of expert opinion and information available, but also it has made the process relatively transparent in ways not possible after World War II. In Germany, it was much more difficult for anyone outside of a planning office to follow reconstruction planning until it was published or presented in an exhibition. The degree of public participation in the New Orleans planning process is also distinctive. With a few exceptions, German planners viewed themselves as professionals and experts with the authority to prepare and impose plans on the uninformed public. New Orleans has staged a great many neighbourhood, district, town, and multi-city meetings to gather public opinion and build public support. The UNOP seeks to empower neighbourhood organizations and not just central planners to implement rebuilding plans.

It is too early to tell, but it is possible that individual, neighbourhood, ward, or district initiatives may do more to shape rebuilding than anything else. There are dramatic proposals for a New Orleans National Jazz Center and for a new park and development on the Mississippi riverfront, both commissioned by private developers, but even if realized, these projects have little to do with the victims of the flooding (Ouroussoff, 2007).⁶ Federal programmes since the 1960s sought to revitalize neighbourhoods, empower their residents, and overcome some of the consequences of white flight to the suburbs (Thomas, 1998, p. 202). There is some evidence that post-Katrina rebuilding is encouraging neighbourhood initiatives in the mostly black areas of the city (Powell, 2007, p. 873; DeVore, 2007; Otte & Fulop, 2008; Deal & Lessin, 2008). It remains to be seen to what degree the city's architects and planners, directed by the Office of Recovery Management, or individual property owners will determine the morphology of these areas.

Notes

1. On 21 April 2006, at a day-long conference on the Marshall Plan held at the National D-Day Museum, museum Director Gordon Mueller said, "We're still waiting for our George Marshall". Thomas Schwartz and I both argued that the Marshall Plan had limited applicability.
2. Peter Larkham and Keith Lilley have identified over 130 towns in Britain that drew up reconstruction plans, including many that had not been bombed at all. Planners in those towns hoped to join a national effort at urban reform through rebuilding.
3. He is, of course, wrong. New Orleans is not Dresden. Dresden's damage was the result of high explosives and fire, not flood. The concentration of damage was also different, with Dresden's

- historic centre suffering the most and outlying residential districts largely spared, the reverse of New Orleans. The East German regime did rebuild some historic buildings in Dresden, but demolished many others, seeking to build what it believed would be a modern socialist city. Only in the 1990s, 50 years after the war, was a major effort launched to try to recreate much of the historic city core.
4. Property owners also acquired a great deal of experience during the war clearing rubble and repairing their homes and buildings, some of which were bombed and repaired several times. They naturally sought to apply that experience when the war ended and did not want to wait for building permits from local authorities.
 5. Thus, Rudolf Hillebrecht moved from Hamburg to Hannover, Friedrich Tamms from Lübeck to Düsseldorf, and Rudolf Schwarz from Alsace to Cologne.
 6. The Jazz Center proposal comes from Morphosis of Santa Monica, California, and the waterfront park from TEN Arquitectos, Hargreaves Associates, and Chan Krieger Sieniewicz. Both Morphosis and Hargreaves Associates participated in the February 2006 architectural conference in Rotterdam organized by Tulane University and the Netherlands Architectural Institute.

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