

REPORTS AND COMMENT

Settlement Reconstruction after War. Workshop Report, 16–18 May 1989

AKBAR ZARGAR

As a follow up to the first workshop of 1988,¹ the Second York Workshop on Settlement Reconstruction After War was organised by Charles Cockburn, Course Director at The Institute of Advanced Architectural Studies, University of York. The workshop was sponsored by the University and the meeting was held at the historical and inspiring building of Kings Manor, the permanent place of the Institute in York.

If the first workshop succeeded in raising the importance of the subject and explored the multidimensional impact of war, which may have been overlooked by architects and engineers, the second provided the opportunity to explore some of the more sophisticated aspects of reconstruction planning.

More than 35 delegates attended the event and 22 presentations were made. It was learned from the previous year that the subject of the workshop required more discussion and exchange of ideas. Thus the presentations were limited to a maximum of 15 minutes to allow sufficient time for discussions. In addition, time was found for group exercises, followed by plenary reporting back.

Although the event was publicised internationally, the delegates who came together showed that the publicity was not very effective in attracting people from overseas, particularly those affected by war. However, among the participants were

natives of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Canada, Colombia, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon as well as Britain. In addition to presentations from most countries just mentioned, there were studies and reports about the Argentine, Northern Ireland, Sudan, Tigray, Yemen; and one speaker discussed Oman, Malawi, Mozambique, and Indonesia. Nevertheless, the poor response and absence of representatives from several charity and international aid organisations that are currently involved in relief and rehabilitation of war-torn communities, as well as those from agencies with war or disarmament as their major concern, was a pity.

The participants were, however, from a wide range of disciplines; architecture, planning, economics, engineering, geography, psychology, history and nursing. Since the subject of the workshop focused on settlement reconstruction, there was a preponderance of architects. However, although this diversity had the advantage of broadening the scope of the arguments, it limited the scope for detailed and in-depth discussions.

The concept of the 22 presentations can be divided into two general categories; those taking a broad view of war and reconstruction and those focusing on a specific subject related to settlement reconstruction. In the first group were contributions on the psychological consequences of disasters,

particularly war. Not only the war veterans, but also the "helpers", are exposed to the mental impact of such catastrophes. Abdul-Wali introduced a psychological survey among the Afghan refugees in Pakistan, illustrating how a new generation of children are born, and grow up accustomed to a war situation. Such a generation may find adjustment to peaceful conditions very difficult.

A presentation under the title of "Dirty Wars" illustrated the case of the "disappeared people" in some of the Latin American countries, with particular reference to Argentina before its return to democracy in 1983. However, the focus of the presentation (by Ross Gilhorne) was on the cultural and psychological dimensions of this policy of making war on civilians. The conclusion drawn from this and the other two papers from the first category was that a comprehensive reconstruction programme should incorporate "societal reconstruction" as well as economic and physical.

Commenting on reconstructed rural areas of the Yemen Arab Republic, damaged by the 1982 earthquake, Jolyon Leslie showed that the will of the victims to reconstruct for themselves had been hampered by unrealistic promises from officials, to rebuild a "Utopian" settlement where once their home had been. Thus, a natural disaster can become a human disaster, the cost of which will not be known for many years.

The presentation by the "political nurse" (Caroline Sergeant) was from her mission to Tigray Province of Ethiopia, an area affected by civil conflict for the last fifteen years. Although the humanitarian aspects of the medical effects were horrible, in technical terms, the ability of the Tigrayan administration to relocate medical centres in a few days, even a "500 bed hospital" with all its equipment and inmates, was of great significance.

Patrick Stanton, a member of the "Association of Pioneer Rescue Officers" attended

the workshop to speak about his long experience of working at the "coal face" of many different disasters. The meeting learned that it is the "ordinary people" who do the best rescue job, and that the job of the official rescuers is to help people to help themselves. He spoke about the need not only to rescue but also to promote survival after the event. He interestingly said that in the exceptional situation of a community shocked by a catastrophe, language becomes a secondary issue; "hearts, eyes and hands" will communicate across any barrier.

Robert McAdam reminded the conference that war refugees are different from others. Their camps are at risk from military attack, or even a planned massacre as in Lebanon. He spoke about the "politics" of relief and intervention and how this is present and has to be taken into account. At the same time, an engineer is perhaps the best person to ignore these facts in the re-establishment of a camp.

Ian Davis gave an interesting update talk on his continuing research into disaster management under the title "Recent rethinking on disaster management". He said the trend is a move from an engineering basis to the economic and social aspects. Not only must buildings resist the hazardous forces and be rebuilt, but families must be helped to recover. The latest developments are in the use of computerised models for vulnerability planning. War reconstruction and recovery from natural disasters have enough similarities to have made his presentation most valuable.

Tat-Seng Lok discussed the theme of "Structural assessment of building damage", which perhaps over-estimated the background of engineering knowledge of the participants. Although techniques exist to assess the strength and stability of a damaged building, it is doubtful, in the absence of trained engineers, whether anything could be done about these structures by other professionals, such as architects.

Akbar Zargar addressed the gaps in our

knowledge about "war as a disaster", as distinct from a natural disaster. Mitigation measures in war time, for instance, may perpetuate the situation and increase the risk of further and escalating attacks. Furthermore, relief and aid to war-torn communities is highly political; aid convoys are vulnerable to ambush and volunteer helpers are at risk from kidnapping or even death. Concerning reconstruction issues after war, the appropriate phases and their duration, the priority of different sectors (rural, urban, etc.), the notion of a return to "traditionalism" or a policy of "modernisation" in settlement design and the gaps in our knowledge necessary to assess and *repair* damaged structures instead of rebuilding them, were among the points raised.

Reconstruction after World War II continues to be a valuable source of study. The recent history of housing in Britain and the impact of war was discussed by Ed Cooney. In his view the ultimate damage to housing after a war is greater than just the number of destroyed buildings. With the interruption to house building and with the shift of civic manufactures to produce war necessities, the deficiencies will accumulate. In Britain, he claimed that the "industrial inefficiency, social policy, and public expectations about housing" all affected the housing deficits after the war. "After 1945 ... the productivity of building did not recover to the level of 1939 until the late 1950s". It also appears that the dream of "prosperity" after the war was, to some extent, a way of keeping up the war-time morale of the people. This, together with expectations raised by the introduction of the "Welfare State", helped to create a climate of public dissatisfaction in the poor housing situation after the war in Britain.

The theme of "culturally oriented reconstruction" was raised specifically by two speakers (Souheil El-Mesri and Sultan Barakat), and provoked a strong discussion. The two presentations dealt with Lebanese villages and the city of Basra in Iraq respec-

tively. It was argued that in the reconstruction of damaged rural areas, people and their customs might be forgotten in favour of modern urban-oriented policies. It was concluded that a careful study of traditional settlements is the first step in securing popular and participatory reconstruction policies and programmes, particularly among rural communities.

Thirty per cent of the presentations addressed the theme of reconstruction after the Gulf War. Kamran Mofid, an economist, estimated that "the total economic cost of the [Gulf] war [is] ... \$1,156 billion". "Which in a better perspective ... exceeds the total oil revenue which Iran and Iraq have received throughout this century". It was emphasised that political stability in the region was a major factor in raising finance for reconstruction projects, and that regional and international support and co-operation are necessary to help the two countries to recover. It was emphasised that those countries who benefited from the sale of weapons could now show their concern by paying part of the cost of reconstruction.

Planning for reconstruction in Iran was discussed by Hooshang Amirahmadi, who gave an account of the extensive damage incurred and the constraints to recovery that faced the nation. He spoke about the situation of no-peace no-war, which had caused both Iran and Iraq to spend large proportions of their limited oil revenue on arms purchases even after the cease-fire. The internal political and administrative problems both countries face, the priority of economic revival and restoration of the national infrastructure, have a greater priority than the reconstruction of settlements.

The concept of the "people's participation" in reconstruction in Iran was explored by Ali Madani Pour. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979 the popular organisations have played a vital role in the country's life. The war was greatly supported by voluntary combatants and in reconstruction during the war, several popular institutions

were established to contribute to the rehabilitation of the devastated areas. However, the speaker argued that the next crucial step is to increase the role of these organisations in the decision-making process as a matter of "democratisation".

Ali Parsa argued that the construction industry can play a vital role during reconstruction. A review of the present situation of the construction industry and its obstacles in Iran were presented. In this respect progress in China was taken as a successful example to draw lessons from. The Chinese have succeeded in developing a construction industry based on "appropriate technology, local initiatives and self sufficiency". It was also claimed, that with the modernisation of their industries after the "open-door" policy of 1979, China had succeeded in winning some 3,800 contracts in 88 different countries. The speaker suggested that policy guidelines for the present situation should include training manpower, and increased use of indigenous materials and techniques. More significantly, it was suggested that "appropriate technology" does not necessarily mean adobe. On the other hand, the industrialisation and prefabrication of the building process is not recommended, but instead, this was an opportunity to mass produce simple building components.

The concept of national planning in relation to security was also discussed. With examples from Malawi, Oman and Indonesia, Geoff Prince argued that the spatial distribution of development investments is influenced by the perceived threat from neighbouring countries, which might seem odd on the grounds of productivity alone.

Paul Stollard made an original contribution on "planning and development in Northern Ireland", where the "troubles" have been going on for at least 20 years. It became apparent that human fatalities and casualties have overshadowed the environmental damage inflicted, yet during the worst years of the troubles (1972-73) 14,000

dwellings were affected by a total of 284 explosions. There is no simple solution to the problem of development planning in Northern Ireland, where the situation is illustrative of how the "deep memories" of communities can affect planning and planning itself becomes "equal to territory".

Nasreen Ghazalah discussed the adaptation of educational buildings for access by those disabled in the Gulf war. The project was started in Iraq in 1985, to cater mainly for amputees and those with bad hearing. Some of the designs for ramps, doorways and lavatories were shown. The point was made that the same concept should be observed at the urban scale, so that the disabled can move more easily in the city. It was also noted that these types of alterations were not started in Britain until forty years after the Second World War ended.

At the end of the second day, draft guidelines on reconstruction during and after war were distributed. These were based on the papers presented, the discussions and the long experience of our Chairman. Participants were divided into four groups for detailed discussions and were asked to present their amendments and comments to the plenary session on the third day. The four groups covered different aspects of the reconstruction process, namely: Social/psychological; Planning, timing/legal framework; Safety and learning from experience and, finally, Economic/resources. The comments were incorporated and the final version of the guidelines is included in the workshop report, which is currently in preparation.

In addition to his own contribution, James Lewis gave a useful review of the three day event. He pointed out that after disaster, whether natural or man-made, the three actions of survival, recovery and reconstruction come in a sequential order and that the people are the essential prerequisite for reconstruction. Recovery requires surpluses in all aspects. The present political circumstances in much of

the world suggest that reconstruction after war should take account of continuation and recurrence of war and of the need to survive again. Finally, he argued that "what caused war to happen has to be built into reconstruction strategy".

In connection with the workshop a new bibliography on "Settlement Reconstruction After War" was produced by Akbar Zargar.² The Institute hopes to organise the "Third York Workshop on Settlement Reconstruction After War" in 1990. The reports of the first and second York workshops, the bibliography and more information about the third workshop can be obtained from Charles Cockburn, Institute

of Advanced Architectural Studies, University of York, York, YO1 2EP, England.

Notes

1. See *Disasters* 12/iii (1988), 209–211.
2. James Lewis produced a Bibliography following the 1988 workshop.

Akbar Zargar
Faculty of Architecture
University of Shahid Beheshti
Evin
Tehran
Iran