



The Role of Post-war Reconstruction Planning in Hiroshima's Image-shift to a Peace Memorial City

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In the wake of war, cities' path to recovery is hindered by a large-scale destruction which is usually combined with issues such as post-war financial difficulties, and complex property rights. During reconstruction, urban areas encounter different drivers of recovery that define the future direction of their urban development. In the case of Hiroshima, the city had an important role as a military industrial centre in Japan since the end of the nineteenth century. However, its atomic bombing during the Second World War marked an end for that era of Hiroshima's history. Therefore, the infamous atomic destruction and the need for a post-war image-shift in Hiroshima ushered the way for its reconstruction as a "Peace Memorial City". This article links the history of planning of Hiroshima with its current state in an endeavour to highlight what Hiroshima's experience could offer other to-be-rebuilt cities. Based on field and archival survey, the article aims to clarify how the reconstruction process has paved the way for the image-shift of Hiroshima to a Peace Memorial City. It argues that Hiroshima's reconstruction illustrates an example where reconstruction planning was an actor in the image transformation using memorialism as a driver of recovery.

Keywords: Reconstruction planning, Image-shift, Memorialism, Hiroshima.

Introduction

Since the start of this decade, there has been a rise in the number of conflict-affected areas¹. A "storm" of hostilities in many urban areas has caused a staggering amount of destruction around the world especially in the Middle East and North Africa². The conflict-prone situation and the prolonged uncertainty make the path for reconstruction undetermined and full of challenges. These facts emphasize the importance of learning from previous reconstruction experiences. A key example of post-conflict recovery is the rebuilding of Hiroshima after the atomic bombing on August 6th, 1945.

Since the end of the nineteenth century, Hiroshima has had an important role as a military, industrial, educational centre in Japan which has set the city's path towards modernization³. The industrial development in the Japanese cities at that period was accompanied with a development in the city planning domain as well through the implementation of the first planning system in 1919⁴, which later was applied in Hiroshima in July 1923⁵. The bombing of Hiroshima has marked a new era in the city's development due to the large devastation the took the lives of 140,000 of its residents by the end of 1945⁶. After its staggering destruction, Hiroshima was able not only to rebuild the damaged areas but also to reinvent itself as a peace symbol.

The article sheds the light on how reconstruction planning has shaped Hiroshima into a memorial city. It also argues that choosing *memorialism* as a driver for recovery has not only set the direction of planning during the reconstruction period but also it was used as a catalyst for recovery. After setting the theoretical background, the article examines the changes in urban form during the reconstruction period.

Drivers of recovery

Cities after conflict often follow different paths of reconstruction based on the dominant drivers guiding their recovery. Those drivers and their associated planning practices depend on the attitude of authorities towards the memory of the event (warfare, natural disaster...etc.), and the tendency towards conversation or new development as illustrated in figure 1.

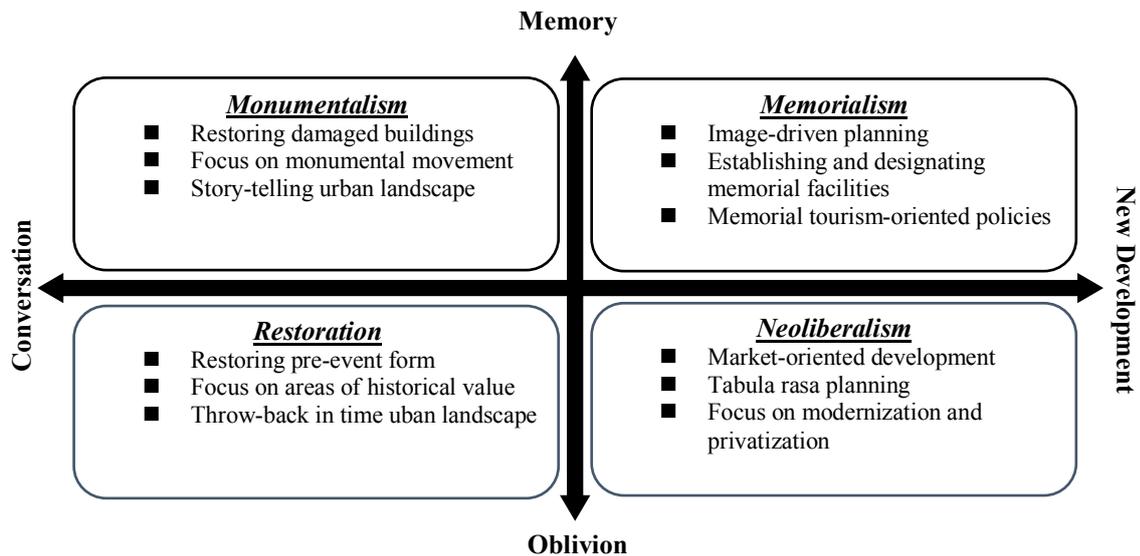


Figure 1. Drivers of recovery

Reconstruction of some post-conflict areas has been carried out with a sense of *oblivion*. An example of a recovery focusing on new development with a deliberate avoidance of the memory of the event could be seen in the redevelopment of Downtown Beirut after the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). The private redevelopment has followed a tabula rasa planning approach driven by market-oriented *neoliberal* policies. As a result, it marginalized state institutions and set privatized planning as the paradigm in the city centre⁷. In harmony with the context of ‘political and psychological amnesia’ following the civil war⁸, the redevelopment makes it difficult for visitors to imagine that the city centre was once a battlefield. Another example of recovery where the memory of the event was washed away by *restoration* could be seen in Old Town Warsaw after WWII. In an attempt to protect the Polish architecture from “western influences”⁹, the recovery was done in a “creative reconstruction” way which pushed back the Old Town to pre-1830 and erased the changes happening after that date because it did not suit the ruling realist socialist ideology at that time¹⁰.

On the other end of the memory spectrum, other reconstruction examples have chosen to include a reference to the event in the recovery process. The unification of Berlin illustrates a case where *monumentalism* was behind the conservation of conflict-related elements. The recovery efforts recognized the return of Berlin Wall to the city’s landscape after the memory-erasing “critical reconstruction” policies failed to express the story of change in Berlin¹¹. By doing so, the wall was used as a vessel to evoke strong images of the city’s memory and transition¹². As for Hiroshima’s reconstruction, it illustrates a memory-informed new development case of recovery. Among the 215 Japanese cities bombed during the events of WWII¹³, Hiroshima demonstrates an example of *memorialism*-driven reconstruction despite the almost “clean slate” rebuilding imposed by the massive destruction of the atomic bombing.

City’s image, brand and identity

In terms of how a city is perceived, scholars have used several terms such as the city’s image, brand, and identity. The notion of the city’s image goes back to Lynch’s seminal book *The Image of the City*. Lynch defines imageability as the ‘quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer.’¹⁴. Scholars argued that a ‘strong and identifiable image’ has a positive influence on the satisfaction of visiting a place¹⁵. As for the city’s brand, scholars have defined city branding as ‘a set of actions aimed to improve the competitiveness of the city internationally ...’¹⁶. Finally, identity is what distinguishes a city and makes it unique, i.e. ‘the extent to which a person can recognize or recall a place as being distinct from other places’¹⁷. Scholars have also pointed out the existing interrelation between the three notions by arguing that city’s brand and identity are based on its image whether it is positive or negative¹⁸, which per se varies among the type of visitors (city residents, domestic tourists, international tourists)¹⁹. Therefore, it could be inferred that the city’s image is how it is seen by its occupants, its brand is how it presents itself, and its identity is what makes it distinguishable from other cities. Thus, the process of image-shift cannot be done by planning alone (city’s side), but it also requires a shift in how occupants perceive the changes in the urban environment (occupant’s side). Examples of image reinvention could be seen in some post-industrial western cities^{20 21}. Hiroshima’s reconstruction demonstrates a war-damaged military industrial city that reinvented itself as a symbol of peace.



Previous research

The reconstruction in Japan after the Second World War has been thoroughly discussed in the literature. Scholars have highlighted several features of reconstruction such as the continuity in central planning before and after the war²²; the project completion ratio-based evaluation of reconstruction^{23 24}; and the remaining vulnerabilities of Japanese cities to disasters despite the reconstruction²⁵. Furthermore, the infamous destruction of Hiroshima has drawn particular interest to its recovery and resulted in a large body of literature on its urban development. Scholarship has examined how reconstruction ideas were dispersed and debated in the immediate years after the bombing, and how later they all merged into one direction²⁶. Research also discussed how the architecture of reconstruction, most referred to by Kenzo Tange's Peace Memorial Park, has introduced a Japanese modernity that 'would be culturally authentic and contemporary'²⁷. Additionally, the role of transnational urbanism and how it has contributed to the reconstruction of Hiroshima were also explored in the literature regarding reconstruction advisors advocating conservation²⁸; their western inspired plans for areas in Hiroshima²⁹; and the reflection of western modernists in Tange's design of the peace memorial museum³⁰. The debate on post-war Hiroshima and reconstruction planning emphasized the importance of policy decisions in the 'construction new identity'³¹, however, it was also argued that the post-war identity per se might have created sites of 'dark tourism'³². This article elaborates on the debate on how reconstruction has changed Hiroshima's image after the bombing.

Methodology

The article is based on a literature survey of primary sources and field survey. Data collection and field survey were conducted in August 2017. Primary resources were obtained from Hiroshima City Archives, Hiroshima City Hall (Naka Ward), and Hiroshima Central Library. The article discusses the planning development of Central Hiroshima as a case study namely the area in Naka Ward located Northern of the Peace Boulevard, mainly discussing road planning and land-use change. It also clarifies the transition in planning by comparing the situation before the war (figure 2), with the current state³³.

Findings

After several reconstruction plans being set in the immediate years after the bombing, the Peace Memorial City Construction Law was promulgated in 1949 as a framework for reconstruction. The law and the later formulated Peace Memorial City Construction Plan in 1952 used *memorialism* as a vessel for the recovery which was expressed through: roads planning, land-use change, and conservation policies.

Roads planning

History of transportation planning in Hiroshima goes back to 1928 when the urban roads planning was fixed³⁴. After the bombing, reconstruction planning was based on a grid-type roads network in a consistent manner with the pre-war planning (figure 3). Since the *modus operandi* in Japanese urban planning is to carry land readjustment, plans were made in which the designated damaged territory was divided into two sectors: western sector carried out by the prefecture, and eastern sector carried out by the city.

The national government issued the Basic Policy for Reconstruction of War-damaged Areas in December 1945 to provide the guidelines for reconstruction. In terms of transportation planning, the basic policy allowed the planning of roads with 50 to 100 meters width when necessary for beautification and disaster prevention³⁵. Many damaged cities around Japan, including Hiroshima, saw this as an opportunity to plan ambitious 100-meter roads, however, later most of the plans were scaled-down or abandoned due to feasibility and financial difficulties³⁶.

The reason why Hiroshima's 100-meter road, currently known as the Peace Boulevard (figure 4), was realized lies in its symbolic value for the city³⁷. Furthermore, the road's importance comes also from a contextual necessity since it was originally a wartime plan as a firebreak for disaster prevention. This illustrates how a military project

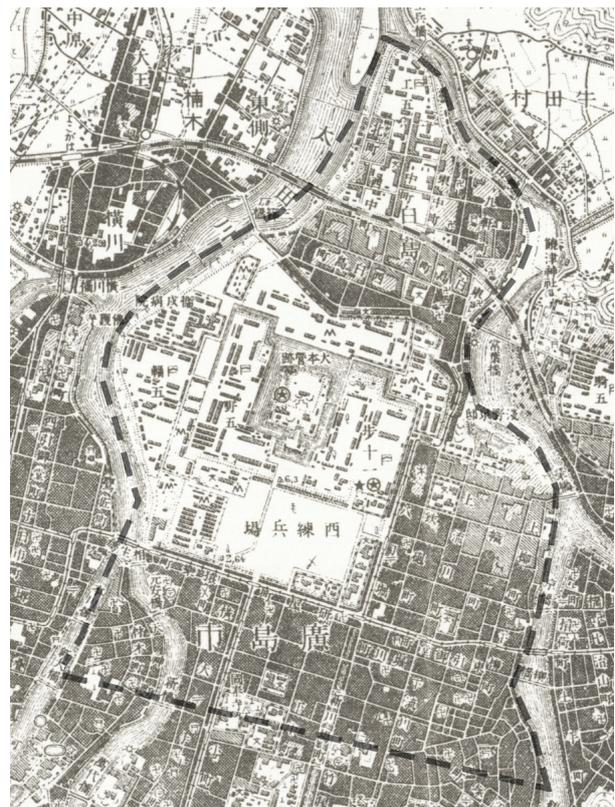


Figure 2. Pre-war Central Hiroshima (1930)



before the bombing was turned into a symbol of peace through the reconstruction³⁸. Former mayor Shinzo Hamai has described the purpose of the plan in his memoir:

“if the central area had an East-West division, the city could be divided into twelve blocks by the rivers and empty land. Even if a major fire takes place, it could be contained within one block.”³⁹

Another important feature of the reconstruction is the influence of cross-cultural planning at that time. As other post-war reconstruction projects have fuelled the flow of international planning professionals⁴⁰, reconstruction in Hiroshima shows an example of transnational urbanism where foreign advisors have contributed to the planning. Stanley Archibald Jarvie from the British Commonwealth Forces (BCOF) was assigned as a reconstruction advisor in Hiroshima during the occupation of Japan. Jarvie proposed a plan for Hakushima district that integrated western planning concepts⁴¹. He proposed fewer blocks and wider curved paths rather than the grid-type plan proposed by the city’s plan. However, Jarvie’s proposal was not implemented since the city’s officials considered it unsuitable for a Japanese urban context^{42 43}.

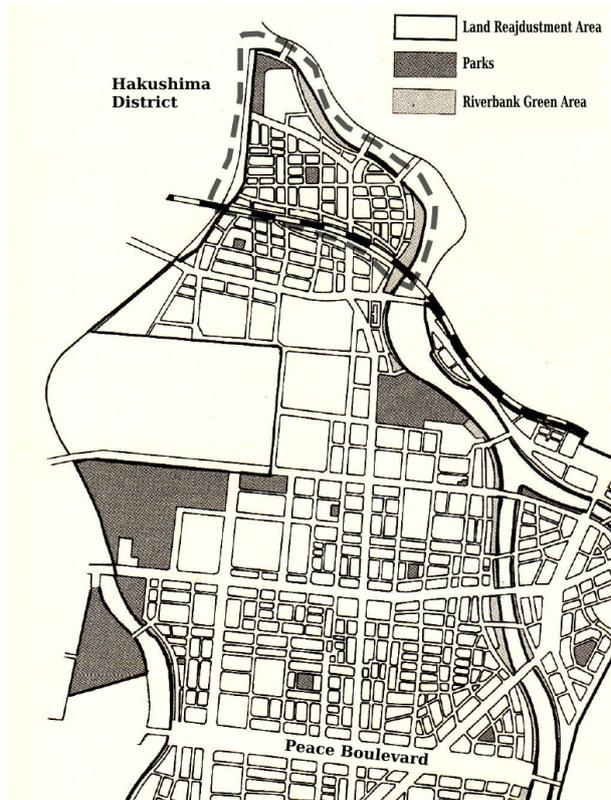


Figure 3. Land readjustment plan for Central Hiroshima



Figure 4. Peace Boulevard in Hiroshima

Land-use transformation

Land-use planning was first decided in Hiroshima in 1927 then modified several times until reconstruction planning was decided in March 1949⁴⁴. The Peace Memorial City Construction Plan later integrated major changes of land-use as a part of the turn-over to a new era for the city. These changes were largely affected by the dominant movement towards memorialism. A well-known example is the transformation of Nakajima District after its devastation by the atomic bombing. The once vibrant commercial district was used to memorialize the disaster by turning it into a Peace Memorial Park.

This memorial park was also a part of a large effort to increase green spaces through reconstruction. Planning authorities in Hiroshima city and prefecture wanted to follow international standards for parks in Hiroshima⁴⁵. On the national level, the government stated in the Basic Policy for Reconstruction of War-damaged Areas that reconstruction plans are required to allocate ten per cent of the city area for green spaces⁴⁶. However, for a city such as Hiroshima where rivers constitute a vital part of the urban environment, reconstruction plans allocated green areas along the riverside as well. The plan of 1952 proposed riverbank greenbelts with a total area of 21.32 ha (13.14 in the East and 8.18 in the West)⁴⁷.

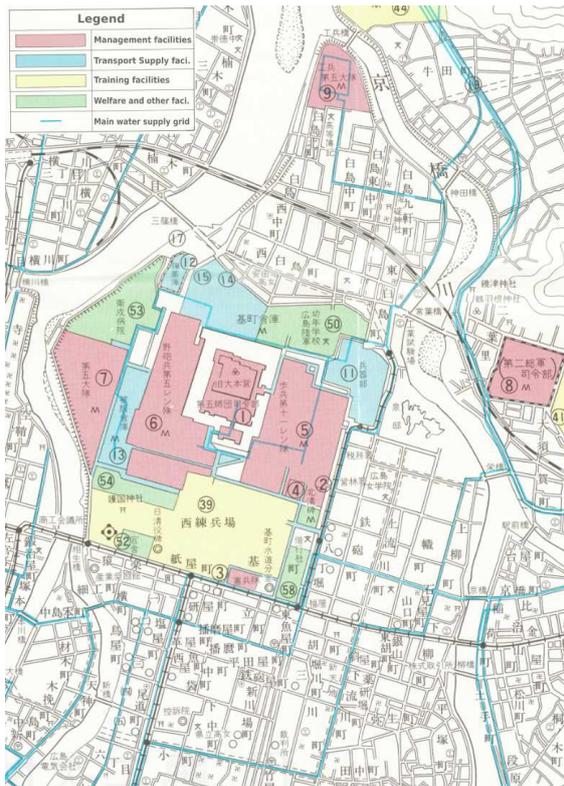


Figure 5. Military-use lands in Central Hiroshima



Figure 6. Map of Central Hiroshima in 1981

Another major example of land-use transformation could be seen in Motomachi District, a once military-use area in Central Hiroshima. The Peace Memorial City Construction Law facilitated the transfer of ownership of previously military-use lands from the national government to the city⁴⁸ (figure 5). For Hiroshima, the military lands, which constituted 9.3 per cent of the city area at that time⁴⁹, did not only have an obsolete purpose but also were unsuitable for the new image of Hiroshima as a symbol of peace. The military lands of Motomachi have kept the district “detached from ordinary citizens’ daily lives”⁵⁰. After the bombing, illegal houses built in Motomachi, and their fire-prone environment, were a long-lasting challenge for reconstruction in the city. It took reconstruction efforts up to the late 1970s to reintegrate the military lands in the district by turning them into civic facilities, parks, and public housing.



Figure 7. Former military lands in Motomachi District (left: public housing and Chuo park – right: Hiroshima Green Arena)

Early reconstruction plans designated the southern part of Motomachi district for the Chuo Park by allocating 70.48 ha of land⁵¹, but later those plans were scaled-down to clear the way for housing. Public housing was built to respond to the dire housing shortage at that time (figure 6). After demolishing the illegal housing, the construction of mid-rise public housing continued from 1956 up to 1968⁵². Later, a plan for high-rise housing was made by Masato Otaka which showed another example of cross-cultural urbanism manifested by piloti-style design and rooftop gardens⁵³. Currently, the once militarized district contains several civic facilities such as Hiroshima Central Library, Hiroshima Museum of Art, and sports facilities (figure 7). By the end of the reconstruction era,



the military character of Motomachi District has been abandoned, however, currently, the district is facing challenges such as deteriorating buildings and ageing residents⁵⁴.

A comparison was made between the current state and the pre-war urban form to shed the light on how reconstruction has ultimately changed Central Hiroshima as illustrated in figure 8⁵⁵. It could be concluded that post-war planning generally kept the original grid-type network structure while adding smaller divisions to the existing blocks. However, the areas with major transformations, namely: former Motomachi District, Nakajima District and, Peace Boulevard, have witnessed almost a complete change in use, road network, and block divisions.

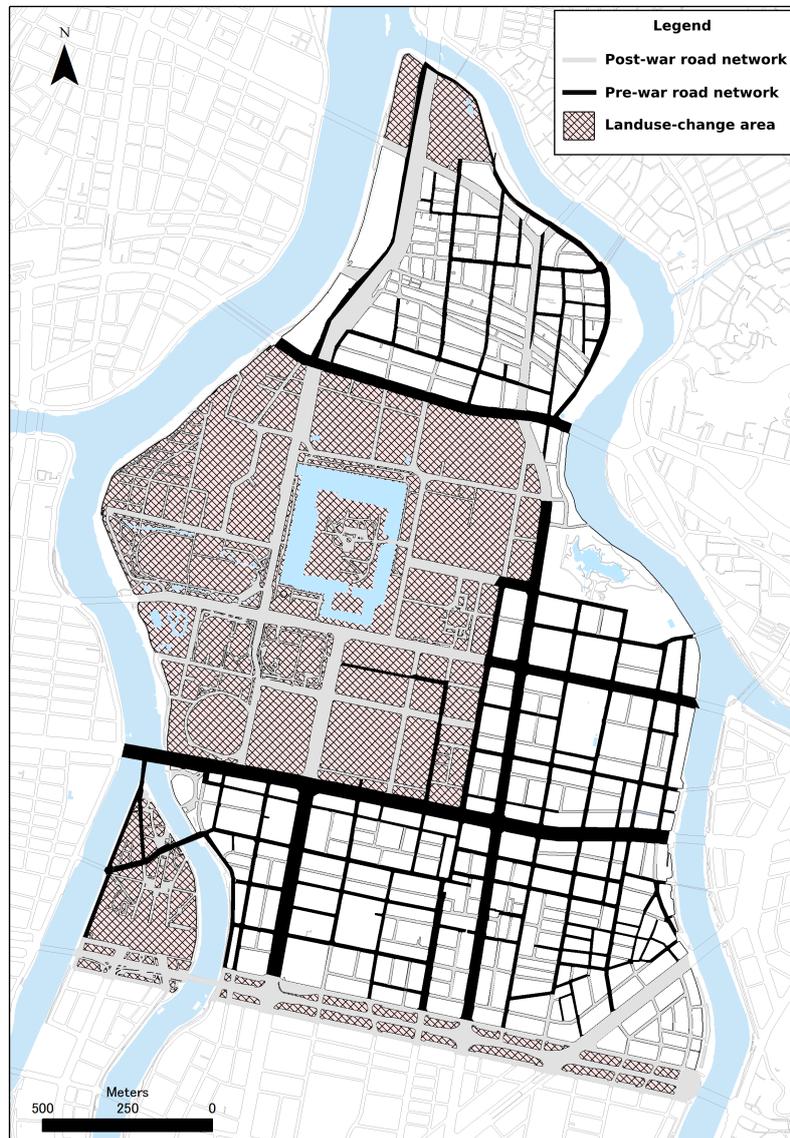


Figure 8. Changes in road network and land-use in Central Hiroshima⁵⁶

Conservation and memorialism

The vision of a memorial city was not only advocated locally but also it was pushed forward by international actors as well. At that time, the Allied Forces in the GHQ closely followed and shaped the financials of reconstruction in Japan⁵⁷, however, they provided the green light for rebuilding Hiroshima as a memorial city⁵⁸. Mayor Hamai has mentioned how Justin Williams, Chief of Legislative Division of GHQ, personally wanted to secure the approval of the GHQ when he was presented with the Peace Memorial City Construction Law proposal⁵⁹. Therefore, the foreign role in memorialism demonstrates another aspect of the international contribution in Hiroshima's recovery, which per se adds to the long existing transnational flow of planning ideas between Japan and overseas as seen in earlier times in the design of Nara and Kyoto, or in more recent examples such as the revival of Ginza in 1873⁶⁰. A key expression of the memorial vision is shown in Tange's design of the Peace Memorial Park which was not only a "major vector in cross-cultural exchange"⁶¹, but also it was a marriage of conservation and memorialism.



The calls for conservation and memorialism especially by reconstruction advisors Australian Stanley Jarvie and American John Montgomery⁶², their expression in Tange's design, and having a clear vision and a solid framework, are all factors that helped the reconstruction become a catalyst for recovery which ultimately established the city's memorial facilities among the most popular touristic sites in the country⁶³.



Figure 9. Memorial facilities in Central Hiroshima (left: Peace Memorial Park – right: Former Bank of Japan, Hiroshima branch)

Conclusion

Hiroshima's choice of memorialism as a driver of recovery was vividly materialized in reconstruction planning. Roads planning aimed to achieve objectives such as disaster prevention and symbolism while keeping pre-war planning practices. Several areas have had major land-use transformation as seen in the reintegration of military-use lands in Motomachi back into the citizens' life. Memorialism kept a reference to the memory of the bombing by establishing memorial facilities and conserving atomic monuments despite the almost clean slate reconstruction.

Transnational urbanism has had an important contribution to the reconstruction of Hiroshima. This contribution could be seen in the influence of western concepts in Tange's and Otaka's designs, getting the green light to build a memorial city from the GHQ, and the proposals of foreign reconstruction advisors. The flow of planning ideas in Hiroshima's reconstruction could arguably be described as a case of *synthetic borrowing* as demonstrated by the adoption of conservation and memorial ideas while discarding Jarvie's Hakushima plan⁶⁴.

The reconstruction of Hiroshima was able to memorialize the atomic bombing even through new development which distinguishes the way the city was rebuilt from other examples. Hiroshima's choice of memorialism has played a role as a catalyst for recovery that ultimately turned the once a militarized city into a popular touristic destination. However, some areas such as Motomachi District that went through a major transformation is currently under stagnation, and how this transformation has impacted its urban vitality is yet to be investigated.

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Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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- ⁵⁶ Notes on the figure: [1] Parts of the Peace Boulevard have existed before the war and the project per se has started even before the bombing, however, due to the road's big role as part of the reconstruction process it was considered as a post-war road. [2] Roads were considered pre-war roads even if they were widened later unless they only existed partially.
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Image sources

Figure 1: Author's construct

Figure 2: City of Hiroshima, Hiroshima Shinshi Shiryouhen III (Chizuhen), – I Shigaihattenzu. 1984.

Figure 3: Sensai Fukkou Jigyoushi Henshuu Kenkyuukai, and Hiroshimashi Toshiseibikyoku Toshiseibibu Kukakuseirika. Sensai fukkou Jigyou-Shi. Hiroshima city, 1995. 67.

Figure 4: Captured by author

Figure 5: City of Hiroshima, Hiroshima Shinshi Shiryouhen III (Chizuhen), – III Dainiji Sekaitaisenji Gunyoushisetsu Haichizu. 1984.

Figure 6: City of Hiroshima, Hiroshima Shinshi Shiryouhen III (Chizuhen), – I Shigaihattenzu. 1984.

Figure 7: Captured by author

Figure 8: Author's construct

Figure 9: Captured by author