Reconstruction of Urban Forests in Hamburg and Dresden after World War II

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Abstract

Extensive firebombing of Hamburg and Dresden during World War II destroyed major portions of the urban forest—in each city. In Hamburg 42 percent of street trees were lost; in Dresden the estimate was 51 percent. The availability of planting stock, economic considerations, and differences in local (Hamburg) versus central planning (Dresden) influenced the reconstruction of those urban forests. The conversion of tree nurseries to vegetable gardens during and after the war delayed replanting in both cities. And while the economic rebound of West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s supported planting and park reconstruction, economic depression combined with the draining of funds from East Germany to pay Russian war reparations slowed progress until the 1980s and 1990s. After the war, Hamburg landowners resisted major changes to the urban fabric, such as street realignments. In Dresden, despite local opposition, portions of the city were rebuilt following the Soviet “16 Principles of Urban Planning.” Reconstruction projects (street widening, freeway construction, new buildings) eliminated approximately 2 percent of the prewar green space supporting trees in both cities. The impact of firebombing on these urban forests contributed to the establishment of postwar tree protection laws in East and West Germany.

Post-disaster recovery city planning street trees parks firebombing
is probably the biggest reconstruction project in Germany right now. The area around the Frauenkirche will be rebuilt in a classic and modern way which Dresden Kirchen World War II. The world war that began 80 years ago when the German armoured divisions crossed the Oder – and ended with a surrender act aboard a warship in Tokyo Bay – was the worst of all wars, ‘the War of the World’ that brought the ‘descent of the West’ (Ferguson 2006). After the war had ended in Europe, 12 million Germans were held as Allied prisoners of war, 2 million of them never to return home. Millions of children across the continent would grow up without a father. The air war destroyed much of the urban housing stock. This left millions trapped in the rural hinterlands without prospects of finding employment and left urban industry with a crashing labour shortage (Vonyó 2012).