

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

Archive of Warsaw Reconstruction Office  
Poland

Ref N° 2010-39

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## PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

### 1. SUMMARY

*‘The recreated modest townscape of Warsaw is a message conveyed to the entire world, that human dignity is priceless, that it is a value which will survive tyrants. The architecture of the city speaks to our hearts in these words when we can see the triumph of Warsaw.’* It was written 40 years after World War II by the American architect A .M. Tung in the chapter “The Heritage of War” (A. M. Tung, *Preserving the World’s Great Cities. The Destruction and Renewal of Historic Metropolis*, New York 2001).

**The reconstruction of Warsaw, the capital city of Poland, in the years 1945-1953, was an outstanding achievement by architects, conservators, artists and workers, and also a meaningful social phenomenon. As a result of the rebuilding, Warsaw, a city doomed to disappear and suffering programmed destruction for ideological and political reasons during the Nazi occupation, became the symbol of an “invincible city”.**

**It also showed the significance of heritage for the shaping of social identity and creating a new meaning to monuments preservation. In this sense, the reconstruction of Warsaw became a precedent that was constantly discussed and affected decisions on similar actions undertaken in a lot of countries until today.**

**The “Archive of Warsaw Reconstruction Office” (“BOS Archive”) kept at the State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw is a testimony of a nearly complete destruction of the city and its rebuilding.**

It encompasses a collection of documents depicting the reconstruction of Warsaw and the destruction of the city in the period of World War II (1939-1945), as a result of warfare in 1939, during the Ghetto Uprising in spring 1943, and Warsaw Rising in August-September 1944, as well as the intentional burning and demolition of the city by special forces of the German army in the period of October-December 1944. This was carried out by order of Heinrich Himmler stating that *‘Warsaw is to be leveled with the earth, and in this way we must give a terrifying example for all Europe’* (testimony by SS General Erich von Bach-Żelewski at Nurnberg trial in 1945).

Consequently, 68% of the city was physically destroyed, and 80% of the Old Town district in. It is estimated that in the course of the pacification, and following the fall of Warsaw Rising in 1944, some two hundred thousand inhabitants were killed, and the remaining population was expelled. Based on studies carried out immediately after the war, and repeated in 2004, we know that financial losses amounted to 54.6 billion dollars.

In the years 1945-1953, the central districts of Warsaw were rebuilt, and in 1980 the district the Old Town along with the Royal Castle was registered on the UNESCO World List of

Natural and Cultural Heritage as a unique restoration and architectural work undertaken to oppose the Nazis' intention.

The "BOS Archive" comprises the following archival collections: **Warsaw Reconstruction Office, Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw and Department of Historical Architecture of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office and the Conservator Office for the Capital City of Warsaw**. They contain documents produced **in the years 1945-1953** and taken over from the occupation period (inventories performed by Polish architects and documents from German offices), as a result of the operation of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office established on 14 February 1945 with the aim to elaborate an urban concept for Warsaw city rebuilding and its implementation, in particular the reconstruction of the Old Town in Warsaw. The institution, referred to as BOS in abbreviation, underwent several reorganizations within a period of 6 years: some departments were separated from it, new units were created or other institutions established (e.g. Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw), closely cooperating for a common cause.

Documents accumulated in the archive illustrate **the recording of war damage from the years 1939-1945 carried out in May 1945**. They provide a specification of the condition of survived buildings, the concept of historic complexes rebuilding, the documentation of designing and investment works relating to monuments restoration. These documents illustrate the works of clearing Warsaw of rubble in 1945, and then the history of the city reconstruction, in particular the recreation of its historical core in the shape developed in a period of 250 years. The Archive includes also documents testifying to the Nazi plans aiming at building a city inhabited exclusively by Germans, and supposed to be erected in place of the demolished district of the Old Town.

The "BOS Archive" fulfils the criterion of uniqueness particularly with respect to the criteria of **time, place and social significance** as it witnesses an event of a great positive influence in the process of overcoming the effects of World War II in the world, in the past and present.

## 2. *DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR*

### 2.1 **Name (person or organization)**

State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw (APW), 00-270 Warsaw, ul. Krzywe Kolo 7.

### 2.2 **Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated**

National archival resource, stored in the State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw in accordance with law in force.

### 2.3 **Contact person(s)**

Ryszard Wojtkowski, Head of the State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw

### 2.4 **Contact details (include address, phone, fax, email)**

Ryszard Wojtkowski, State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw, ul. Krzywe Koło 7, 00-270 Warsaw, tel. 22 635-92-42, e-mail: [archiwum@warszawa.ap.gov.pl](mailto:archiwum@warszawa.ap.gov.pl)

### **3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated**

**The “Archive of Warsaw Reconstruction Office” comprises three Archival Collections No. 25, 26 and 27.** The archival collection **Warsaw Reconstruction Office, Collection No. 25**, contains documents in form of records (orders and circulars of the management, general and departmental organizational charts, minutes and resolutions from meetings of department heads, department work plans, and correspondence in matters of locations, allocation of premises, reconstruction, financial resources management; in the Inventory and Statistics Department there are preserved photographic materials, drawings and statistical studies concerning general destruction and individual elements of municipal infrastructure; departments including research and development units preserved various studies carried out by outstanding specialists in different fields and necessary in the process of drawing up individual urban assumptions and elaboration of financial plans.), photographs, drawings and statistical materials. Plans, descriptive, graphic and digital materials regarding the condition of technical investments in Warsaw, including buildings, elements of communication infrastructure and non-built up areas.

**Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw, Collection No. 26.** The Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw was created on 12 April 1946 based on a decree from 24 May 1945. The Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw was entrusted with the construction, rebuilding, conversion and thorough refurbishment of buildings intended for authorities, public offices, industrial plants and dwellings for employees of these institutions, and also other technical and construction tasks commissioned by the Ministry of Reconstruction (technical supervision among others). In 1950, the Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw was converted into the Inspectorate of Building Control, which in 1951 was included in the Worker Housing Estate Construction Directorate.

The preserved materials comprise: directives relative to the organization of the Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw, the Ministry of Reconstruction and other institutions, organizational charts, guidelines for individual departments, minutes from briefings, coordination meetings, and consultation sessions. Reports from internal inspections, remuneration standards, materials produced for court cases involving contractors – contracts, accounts, cost estimates, court decisions. Similar documents survived in the Planning and Execution Office (among others documents regarding the East-West Route, extremely important for the newly developed urban layout in the vicinity of the Old Town), in the Commissioning Office, in the Supervision Office and the East-West Route Inspectorate.

The **Archival Collection No. 27** - The Department of Historical Architecture of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office and the Conservator’s Office for the Capital City of Warsaw - contains work plans, reports, organizational charts, minutes, orders, offers, reports, historical outlines and cost estimates. It also comprises sketches, site plans, drawings and photographs.

The listed collections are kept in the State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw. They include **11,679** archival units, in two Divisions - No. I and IV .

In Division I – Collection No. 25 – 6584 archival units, No. 26 – 2207 archival units, No. 27 – 778 archival units. = 9569 archival units; in Division IV Collection No. 25 – 5110 archival units)

### **3.2 Description**

The “BOS Archive” is a collection of materials in form of documents and records, photographs, drawings, planning and technical documentation, accumulated and produced in the period 1945–1953, as well as inherited from the period of World War II, as a result of the operation of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office and related units. The Office was created on 14 February 1945 following the transformation of the Office for the Organization of Warsaw Reconstruction (established on 22 January 1945 by the Mayor of Warsaw, headed by Prof. Jan Zachwatowicz). Eng. Arch. Roman Piotrowski was appointed as BOS Director, and Eng. Arch. Szymon Syrkus and Arch. Witold Plapis as Deputy Directors.

The tasks and structure of BOS were defined by a decree of the State National Council from 24 May 1945. The main tasks of BOS included the development of an urban concept for new Warsaw, and the completion of the city reconstruction. From then on, BOS functioned under the Mayor of Warsaw and was directly subordinated to: Chief Council of Warsaw Reconstruction and its executive organ the Committee for the Capital City Reconstruction. BOS activities were financed by the Ministry of Reconstruction. The BOS records feature: regulations and circulars of the management, general and departmental organization charts, minutes and resolutions from meetings of department heads, department work plans, and the correspondence concerning locations, allocation of premises, reconstruction, financial resources management.

■ The Inventory and Statistics Department (headed by Eng. Witold Plapis, and then Eng. Arch. Stanisław Chrabelski). The Department accumulated inventory, descriptive, graphic and digital materials concerning technical investments in Warsaw, including buildings, elements of communication infrastructure and non-built up areas. In the first period, a graphical and descriptive picture of destruction in the years 1939-1945 was drawn up, encompassing individual types of premises which were assigned to 9 categories depending on the state of destruction.

The city was divided into areas and drawings were elaborated in order to mark the actual state of destruction. This condition was determined based on personal observation, and then marked on the city map.

A division of buildings into 3 categories was implemented:

a) survived buildings, b) destroyed buildings requiring complete refurbishment, c) completely destroyed buildings. The produced inventory of damages of Warsaw urban structure is represented by archival documents that were preserved:

1. An inventory of barricades of Warsaw Rising from 1944 conducted in April 1945.
2. An inventory of Warsaw building structure drawn up in March and April 1945 along with an inspection of structures threatening the safety of residents.
3. The ‘Warschau plan’ prepared by Germans together with five outlined perspective drawings to the plan mentioned above, approved in Berlin in 1942 as the so-called Pabst plan. It involved the erection of a huge NSDP hall in place of the Royal Castle and an urban development for a population of approximately 40 thousand inhabitants.

Photographic materials, drawings and statistical studies concerning general destruction and individual elements of municipal infrastructure were preserved in the Inventory and Statistics Department. Various studies by outstanding specialists in different fields, necessary when elaborating individual urban planning assumptions and financial plans survived in departments comprising research and development units.

■ The Urban Planning Department, also called Urban and Urban Planning Department prepared general and detailed plans of urban development.

Individual organizational departments were gradually separated from BOS and formed independent units, such as the Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw, which took over investment activities. Some tasks were also handed over to municipal or state authorities. The Conservator Office for the Capital City of Warsaw operated from 1947. In 1948, a gradual liquidation of BOS started. In 1951, BOS functions were taken over by the Warsaw Urban Planning Office. Documents of the “BOS Archive” from the years 1951-1953 come from organizational units operating longer than the Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw.

#### 4. *JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA*

##### 4.1 **Is authenticity established?**

The “BOS Archive” contains documents produced by an institution and its divisions, departments, and institutions that were transformed and operating under different specific names – established to achieve a specific objective: the rebuilding of a city which had been methodically demolished. Inventory records found in the collection were made in the field, based on personal observation. All documents are **authentic** and form an **integral** thematic collection.

The “BOS Archive” does not contain all records produced by the entities in charge of inventories of destruction and the reconstruction of Warsaw. They were repeatedly moved under the conditions of a city under reconstruction. A part of them had been lost already at the time of the institution operation, some had disappeared following its liquidation, before they could be handed over to the State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw. However, the “BOS Archive” contains all documents which are testament to all actions undertaken and constitutes a complete testimony.

##### 4.2 **Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established?**

The “BOS Archive” is a collection of **unique** documents as they form a single and one of a kind historical source, describing and testifying activities undertaken in the years 1945-1953 with the aim to rebuild Warsaw from rubble, in particular its historic district that was registered on the UNESCO List of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1980. They are of a unique nature also due to the scope and size of works, an extraordinary credibility of the reconstruction and their significance for the cultural and national identity of Poles who, at the end of war, did not regain sovereignty and found themselves behind the so-called iron curtain and were subjected to a systematic totalitarian indoctrination.

It should be emphasized that the reconstruction of Warsaw was considered by the international community as a positive example of overcoming the effects of war and a reference to values associated with the tradition of culture. The execution of the

reconstruction of the Old Town in Warsaw, in particular the use of research documentation and traditional techniques has had until today an influence on the definition of the international doctrine of monuments preservation, of which the “BOS Archive” is a source document. The example of Warsaw was referred to, among others, after 1990 during the reconstruction of the intentionally destroyed Orthodox churches in Moscow and Kiev, and historic buildings in the centre of Dresden.

#### **4.3 Is one or more of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style satisfied? (see 4.2.5)**

**Criterion of time:** the “BOS Archive” is a record of the reconstruction of Warsaw in a precisely determined, exceptional period of eight years following the end of World War II, and is a testimony of the history of the first post-war years. It depicts the scale of destruction and shows an example of a great amount of initiative and effort triggered for the purpose of reconstruction. Numerous memories and documents distinctively show the uniqueness of this period as they are especially evocative of their time.

**Criterion of place:** Warsaw was the city which enormously suffered from the war disaster. It became a symbolic place referred to as “invincible city”, the only one where the Jewish population closed in a ghetto opposed the invader by force of arms (1943), and where a rising of unprecedented scale, lasting from August to October 1944 and organized by authorities of the Polish state in conspiracy (Home Army) against regular troops of the German army took place.

**Criterion of people:** The Warsaw Reconstruction Office had 1422 employees, including 351 engineers, 28 construction experts, 534 technicians, 9578 employees in construction.

Among other specialists were economists, lawyers, historians, artist-painters, graphic designers. The most eminent BOS employees included Prof. Jan Zachwatowicz, Prof. Piotr Biegański, Prof. Bohdan Lachert, Prof. Stanisław Hampel, Dr. Stanisław Żaryn, outstanding architects, urban planners, but also historians of art and conservators such as Prof. Stanisław Lorentz, and historians like Prof. Janusz Durko, the founder of the Historical Museum of Warsaw, figures who held important positions in UNESCO and international organizations in the next decades. We can mention the example of Prof. Jan Zachwatowicz who was the signatory of the Venice Chart and author of the sign of monument designed for the needs of Hague Convention, currently the most popular sign used for historic buildings. Another eminent figure with international standing was Prof. Stanisław Lorentz, who for many years represented Poland in ICOM and who, together with Prof. Jan Zachwatowicz, founded ICOMOS in Warsaw in 1965. The “BOS Archive” is a testimony of their extraordinary work, in extraordinary times, and for an exceptional cause. The impact of this work on the European opinion has been evident since the beginning of the reconstruction. The exhibition “Warsaw accuses” in 1946 was to bring awareness of the scale of war destruction. Publications released on the occasion of the exhibition and presented in the Library of Congress in Washington in 1946 included an article entitled “Warsaw Lives Again” by an eminent sociologist Prof. Lewis Mumford. It was also published in “The Architects Journal”.

In Italy in 1946, Piotr Biegański presented the concept of the Old Town reconstruction, which was then published in an urban development magazine “Metron”. Foreigners visiting Poland could better understand the post-war doctrine of

monuments preservation formulated by Prof. Zachwatowicz and claiming that monuments and nation are one, and although destroyed during the war, they must be faithfully reconstructed in order to restore their social significance.

**Criterion of object and subject:** Destruction and reconstruction of Warsaw is a unique subject of the archival collection. The “BOS Archive” gathers documents of a special, unique institution, established in an unusual situation and exceptional period. Although the organizational structure of the institution formed of groups of employees and specialists was a typical one, the modus operandi of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office was entirely subordinated to unusual circumstances and exceptional needs. More than half a century later, it seems incredible that the reconstruction of Warsaw could have been carried out with the use of such simple tools, and in such a short period of time.

**Criterion of form and style:** this criterion does not have signs of uniqueness with respect to the “BOS Archive”. The “BOS Archive” features typical forms of archival documentation.

**Criterion of social significance:** The “BOS Archive” provides the evidence of work whose social impact was, and still is exceptional, going beyond activities well-known elsewhere and aiming at the elimination of destruction caused by natural disasters or warfare. It is an example of social bond and solidarity that crystallized in a joint action on an unprecedented scale. A particularly significant example as the situation occurred immediately after the War, in times of repression inflicted on the Polish society at the turn of the forties and fifties, at the climax of the Stalinist terror in Poland.

The photographs of ruins and districts of burned out houses became an “icon” permanently associated with the destruction of Warsaw, a testimony of a war which tragically affected Europe. Signs of it are found in an article from “International Herald Tribune” (18 October 2005) discussing a book about the after-war reconstruction of Europe, where the only illustration was a photograph of Warsaw in ruins. “Destroyed Warsaw” became a contemporary mental shortcut, a slogan, however the reconstruction was astonishing due to its scale and momentum. As a result of this, the rebuilt Old Town and Royal Castle became a clear “icon” for conservators of monuments.

An example of influence of the reconstruction of Warsaw in later years was the statement from 1987 by Johannes Körner from the University of Architecture in Coburg in a paper entitled “Changes occurred in the mentality of West-German preservation of monuments stimulated by the reconstruction of Polish monuments after the war” given in Szczecin, where he stresses that since the seventies, numerous pilgrimages of architects and conservators have visited Poland to watch and then utilize the Polish solutions. The reconstruction of Warsaw, and the Old Town in particular, is presently viewed as a significant factor of the civic community of the town and the entire country. In 2005, Warsaw hosted a conference on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of registration of the Old Town on the UNESCO World List of Natural and Cultural Heritage with the participation of representatives from England, Germany, France, Austria and Norway who depicted in 30 papers the reconstruction of Warsaw as an extraordinary and constantly inspiring phenomenon. The present influence of the reconstruction is reflected by the Jean Paul L’Allier prize awarded to

Warsaw for the lighting of the Old Town walls at the 10<sup>th</sup> International Congress of OWHC (2009).

**4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?**

Yes

5. *LEGAL INFORMATION*

**5.1 Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)**

The Head Office of State Archives  
State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw

**5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)**

Senior Custodian - Danuta Bondaryk, Senior Custodian - Małgorzata Sikorska

**5.3 Legal status:**

(a) Category of ownership

Owned by State Treasury

(b) Accessibility

Availability (scope and manner) – the archival materials forming the following collections: Warsaw Reconstruction Office and Department of Historical Architecture of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office and the Conservator Office for the Capital City of Warsaw and the Directorate for the Reconstruction of Warsaw are made available at the Scientific Laboratory of the Archives. From 10.00 a.m. to 4.00 p.m. on Monday to Wednesday, and from 10.00 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. on Thursday and Friday. The records mentioned above are used by the Archives for a great number of preliminary archival surveys carried out by individuals and offices.

(c) Copyright status - No

(d) Responsible administration

Administrative responsibility - protection of the state archival resource (Act from 14 July 1983 on the State Archival Resource and Archives)

(e) Other factors –

6. *MANAGEMENT PLAN*

**6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage?**

If yes, attach a summary of the plan. If no, please attach further details about current storage and custody of the materials.

The State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw together with the Society of Friends of the State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw have been granted a subsidy from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage for the project of digitalization and execution of a digital copy of part I of documentary records of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office. The first stage of digitization started in September 2009, and will be completed according to schedule in May 2010.

Before the beginning of the digitization process, the records were subjected to restoration treatment including smoothing out folds, backing, supplementing paper depletions. As part of Stage I of the project the granted subsidy enables the digitization of records of the BOS Inventory and Statistics Department containing information regarding the destruction of buildings in inventoried areas, degree of building burnout, damage of roofs, walls and the number of survived floor levels that were shown on graphical appendices along with a degree of building destruction marked with appropriate colors.

Following the completion of digitization, the materials will be made available in form of a digital copy to a wide group of users of the state archival resource in the Scientific Laboratory of the State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw, and in form of reproductions at exhibitions, traditional and online presentations, lectures, conferences, seminars, which will allow everyone to become a recipient of the historical messages. The materials will also be made available on-line.

## 7. *CONSULTATION*

### **7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee**

(a) Ryszard Wojtkowski, ul. Krzywe Koło 7, 00-270 Warsaw, tel. 22 635-92-42, e-mail: [archiwum@warszawa.ap.gov.pl](mailto:archiwum@warszawa.ap.gov.pl)

(b) Danuta Bondaryk, ul. Krzywe Koło 7, 00-270 Warsaw, tel. 22 635-92-42, e-mail: [akta\\_warszawy@warszawa.ap.gov.pl](mailto:akta_warszawy@warszawa.ap.gov.pl)

(c) Małgorzata Sikorska, ul. Krzywe Koło 7, 00-270 Warsaw, tel. 22 635-92-42: e-mail: [ikonografia@warszawa.ap.gov.pl](mailto:ikonografia@warszawa.ap.gov.pl)

(d) Sławomir Radoń, The Head Office of State Archives, Chairman of the National "Memory of the World" Committee, ul. Rakowiecka 2 D, 02-517 Warsaw, tel. 22 565-46-00, e-mail: [ndap@archiwa.gov.pl](mailto:ndap@archiwa.gov.pl)

## **PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

### 8. *ASSESSMENT OF RISK*

**8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage (see 5.5)**

Preservation threats:

- disappearing text
- paper brittleness
- disappearing image on photographs, crumbling emulsion, paper curling

**9. ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION**

**9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage (see 3.3)**

- securing materials through digitization (stage I already started)
- the need to move records to files and non-acidic boxes

Protective systems of the building of the State Archives of the Capital City of Warsaw at No. 7 Krzywe Koło St..

- 24-hour physical protection of the building by a licensed security company.
- Anti-burglar system connected to the monitoring system of the 24-hour internal protection service of the building.
- Fire alarm system connected to the monitoring system of the 24-hour internal service of the building and the State Fire service.

**10. SPECIAL RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION PROGRAMMES IN THE NEAR FUTURE**

**Warsaw Chronicle – publication dedicated to the protection of BOS records**