

Reconstructing Emmerich's history during and after the World War

A study on the reconstruction of a
destroyed German city and its people

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Foreword

Upon choosing a theme for this work in the field of post-war reconstruction my first thought was to go with the city of Emmerich in Germany. As the town is local to where I grew up and the origin of my father's side of the family, I always had a personal connection to it. Moreover, the reason I am especially interested in the post-war times in Emmerich is that my late father was born there in the fall of 1947, merely 3 years removed from the complete destruction of the city in an Allied bombing raid on the 7th of October 1944. This hard circumstance of upbringing, especially in contrast to my personal experience growing up in the same area 50 years later has been of interest to me since being old enough to talk about it with my father. Considering my training in the field of architecture, which this work is a part of, a special interest of mine is in how the issue of accommodation was solved at a time when the vast majority of dwelling was rendered unlivable by the bombing. As evidence laid out through the remainder of the report shows, only one in roughly 30 dwellings was still intact at the time my father was born in Emmerich. Considering this baseline, the journey made by people of his generation and the city to recover from the destruction and the trauma of war is what sparked my interest in investigating this topic further. Thinking about the complex process of urban and individual architectural planning in modern times, and contrasting it with the lack of material and human resources at the time makes it particularly interesting to me to research whether the reconstruction was actually a planned effort or more of a situation where everyone on their own just tried to build some shelter. This curiosity and the possibility to write about the history of my native area and its hardest times accessible to people from other backgrounds is what led to me writing this piece on the post-war reconstruction of Emmerich, or the so-called “most destroyed city in Germany“.

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Introduction

“After viewing those images, one has to accept that the old Embrica decora is definitely a thing of the past. Gone are the well-proportioned, individually designed middle-class houses of a well-situated town. Instead, the image of the city is now ruled by the grid, prefabricated construction pieces, concrete and cliché “ (Gies,1977) These are the words of Leo Gies after putting together a selection of images in 1977 comparing the city of Emmerich before and after the devastation and following reconstruction of the city. In the later phase of WW2, the Allied forces started a massive offensive in order to fight back the Germans behind the river Rhine, and finally free the country of the Nazi regime. After 4 years of occasional attacks on the cities infrastructure, the Allied forces decided to take the final blow to Emmerich on the 7th of October 1944, when hundreds of British bomber planes appeared over Emmerich dropping 656 explosive and 700.000 incendiary bombs on the city, killing 600 people (Tekolf, 1999). This left the city as one of the worst destructed cities in Germany. In the following, the destruction of the city and the consequent reconstruction will be investigated.

Due to the general lack of resources and human workforce after the second world war, the amount of historical recordings at the time is very limited and scattered through many smaller local associations, this investigation will try to use theoretical frameworks as well as sources from other areas of Germany in order to interpolate missing data within Emmerich. This leads to the research question of: *Reconstructing Emmerich's history during and after the World War 2. A study on the reconstruction of a destroyed German city and its people.*

This thesis will investigate the hypothesis that although the almost complete destruction of the city offers planners a blank canvas to improve the current makeup of the city, the poverty of resources at the time would lead to an unplanned refilling of the emptied lots. Considering the lack of even paper at the time, the focus on urban design concepts is assumed to be very limited. While in cities like Berlin, major planners of the time were commissioned to draft reconstruction plans, this thesis is going to investigate how far this was happening in smaller cities like Emmerich.

Although the city of the case study reached tragic fame in Germany after WW2 for being one of the most destroyed cities in the country, the actual literature on its reconstruction post-conflict is fairly scarce. Due to the lack of not only resources but also manpower due collect information for historical records, those efforts were focused on the bigger cities and industrial centers of the country. While there is ample literature on the destruction and resurrection of Berlin, for example, the smaller cities involved in the allied mission along the Rhine were rebuilt under the radar of public record. Therefore many of the sources available for this research or publications of local history clubs or the cities themselves.

In order to gain an understanding of the process of reconstruction in Emmerich, the topic will be covered in three different steps. To understand the baseline of the reconstruction process, the first chapter will show the city as it was known before the war, described as *Embrica Decora*, gorgeous Emmerich, and how the founding of the building cooperative influenced the city. The second chapter aims at giving an underlying situation during the war, leading to the allied bombings and positioning them in context. Further, the second chapter will give a critical look at how to deal with witnesses of the time, or “Zeitzeugen“. Chapter three takes a look at the destruction caused by the bombings of October 1944 and what was left of the city, turning *Embrica decora* into *Embrica Desolata*. The fourth chapter will then look at the reconstruction of Emmerich, after giving the context of reconstruction in other parts of Germany. This will be done by using the account of the aforementioned Building Cooperative Emmerich and by comparing images taken before and after the war to see what changes the city has undergone in the process. Finally, the last chapter will provide an account of one of the most important figures in Emmerich's reconstruction, Paul Maria van Aaken. He did not only shape the future of the city in his position as its first mayor after the war, but he was also the architect behind many building projects shaping the post-war face of the city.

In conclusion, this thesis is going to gather existing historical evidence about the reconstruction of Emmerich and fill in possible blanks with interpolation based on theoretical evidence. In the following, the existing literature will be laid out further and assessed based on possible intentions of publishing.

Chapter 1 Embrica Decora

1.1 Embrica Decora - the city before the war

„Shining are you lying there, thrice lucky Emmerich, near the peacefully streaming waters of the river Rhine“ (Gies, 1977). As handed down, these were the words of an unknown poet looking at the city of Emmerich 3 centuries ago.

The city of Emmerich is located on the east bank of the river Rhine in northwestern Germany, which allowed it to be a thriving trade city for the last millennia. According to the city, the first written mention of Emmerich, then named Villa Embrici, while given official city rights in the year 1233. Since the late 13th century, Emmerich was part of the German Hanse, a powerful trade organization active throughout northern Europe, which at the peak connected up to 200 European cities to connect their economical powers (Graichen et al, 2013). In the 13th century, the patron of the city ordered to have walls built around the cities. The gates placed in the city wall to this day are the origin of the names of locations in the city, like “Löwentor“ (lions gate) or the “Moolenport“ (mill gate). A major role in the face of the city throughout the time was covered by the school and its multiple churches. One of those churches, the Allegundis church, has origins dating back to the founding of the settlement in the 8th century (Gies,1977,p. 32). The church has undergone many changes, from a wooden building in the beginning to being transitioned into a stone church in the 11th century to being burned down in fires. The last change before World War 2 was done to the peak of the tower, which has been destroyed by fire in the 17th and reconstructed in 1861. Another church that had been a landmark in the city for centuries is the Martini church, located on the opposite end of the waterfront, acting as the face of the city seen from the other side of the river. This church was built at a similar time as the stone church for St.Allegundis in the 11th century. This church has undergone only one reconstruction after flooding through the river destroyed the church in the winter of 1238. From then on, the newly built church remained in its location until 1944. In the following, a collection of historic images of the city will be presented to gain an understanding of the city's structure.



Figure 1 Waterfront ca.1900



Figure 2 Old Markt in 1901 with public life



Figure 3 Old town hall before the war



Figure 4 Kass-Strasße around 1930

As the images shown above show, the image of the city before the war was dominated by traditional German middle-class housing and commercial buildings. Similarly, the public buildings in the city, like the town hall seen above, show a high grade of elaboration in accordance with their representative function. Due to its importance in trade over the last centuries, Emmerich's former wealth shows within the built environment pre World War 2, Which earned it the name *Embrica decora*.

1.2 Formation of the Baugenossenschaft Emmerich

Due to the rapidly spreading industrialization and the access to the railroad that it provided to Emmerich, the city encountered fast growth in the late 19th century both regarding its inhabitants as well as their financial power. During this time, in the year 1894, the first form of the Baugenossenschaft Emmerich, the Building Cooperative Emmerich was founded. Their initial plan was to collect 40 DM a year from every member to be able to buy one plot a year and build a house on it (Tekolf, 1999, p. 11). The aim of this was to provide quality housing for the city as well as build assets for the organization and its members. In the year 1899, the cooperative was transformed into its still existing form as a registered organization.

Due to their status as a registered organization they were obliged to keep a close record of their assets and finances, they are one of the few sources with exact accounts of the consequences of the war and the following reconstruction. As this makes their record one of the most valuable sources for this report and it also offers insights into the underlying ideas being the city planning before and after the war, this chapter will give a brief introduction to the cooperative and the housing they contributed to the city.

At the founding in 1899, a total of 58 inhabitants joined the initial organization, each paying a share of 300 DM to join. To quote from the protocol of this first meeting on the targets of the organization: “Mayor Menzel opened the meeting and showed the need to provide healthy, cheap housing for the simple man, the creation of an own home for the worker.” (Tekolf, 1999, p. 16) Although the target was to create affordable housing, for the cooperative this meant creating small individual houses for the first decades of their existence. To give an example of their early buildings, the following photographs show two of their projects realized before the war.

The first project is one of the first buildings realized after its founding in 1899, and Figure 5 shows 2 of the 4 houses built in the Speelberger Straße around 1904. As can be seen, the housing features a lot of space for the time, where on average one inhabitant in Germany had about 8 square meters of living space (Pfister, 2014). Furthermore, the execution shows simple volumes of the buildings, yet features a high grade of detail, featuring window shutters on the outside of the ground floor as well as dormer windows in the attic.



Figure 5 Speelberger Straße around 1930



Figure 6 Netterdensche Straße

Until the war the end of the war in 1945, the cooperative had built a grand total of 224 houses, including a total of 264 dwellings. As can be seen from these numbers, during the first 45 years of its existence, the cooperatives building effort was focussed on providing individual housing for its members and other inhabitants of the city, who they offered rental dwellings. Out of the total 29 projects they realized, only 5 featured shared use, which in this case meant sharing one house between two families. This means that before the reconstruction, the cooperative had never attempted the realization of an apartment building, showing that the city was in a situation where the quantity of housing provided was sufficient to focus their efforts on the quality and providing individual family homes. This should change significantly after the 1945, which will be discussed in chapter 4.2.

Chapter 2 Context to the events and accounts

2.1 The difficulty of dealing with „Zeitzeugen“

As the number of written records from the times of the war and especially the final stages of it were low to begin with and existing ones were often destroyed or lost during the chaotic times. Therefore, reliable information about the time is often not available, especially around the events in smaller towns, like for example Emmerich. To still get an impression of what the time was like, The accounts of people who lived through the events and experienced them firsthand are often taken to hand. While these accounts can often provide new information and add a human perspective to the events, they have to be critically assessed in every case. Not only the sometimes decades-long span between the event and its recording can introduce inaccuracies to the story, but the time the accounts are given also can influence the way people report past times. Furthermore, especially in high-stress situations like wartime, it is hypothesized that eye-witness accounts are less reliable, although a paper published by John Yullie, a Canadian forensic psychologist talking about the witnesses, suggests that „their stress levels at the time of the event appeared to have no negative effects on subsequent memory.“(Yullie, 1986)

In German history, witnesses of the time, or Zeitzeugen, have played an important role in the writing of history after the 2 world wars of the 20th century. In order to do the complexity of the subject and the times involved justice, the time of recording of the account is almost equally as important as the circumstances of the time of the event. Especially in the case of Germany during and after the Nazi regime, any record has to be assessed critically. Apart from the hardship the inhabitants of cities like Emmerich went through themselves, the atrocities committed by the Germans during the second world seem so unimaginable only a generation later. As many interviews were recorded decades after the war, witnesses could have altered their stories, especially regarding their commitment or participation in the cruelties committed. This could be done on one hand out of shame about what happened, or on the other hand out of fear of consequences. Therefore, for a reliable assessment of the account, the personal biography of the

individual has to be taken into account. For example, in the case of Paul Maria van Aaken, whose account of the time after the war will later be presented in Chapter 5, a closer look at his biography shows that he likely has not been closely connected to the NSDAP regime, as other than his own account there is another source report him in conflict with the regime. According to an account on the page of his former football team in the town, his catholic youth group as well as his youth team was closed down by the regime, as they were not acting in line with the ideology of the regime (Bartels, 2016). To give a better understanding of the other difficulties encountered when dealing with witnesses of the times a book published by German historian Martin Sabrow. Related to the question of participation in the doings of the nazi regime, Sabrow raises the question, of how far the culprits of the time can also be allowed as witnesses, or if they have to be excluded from the record, as they are too incentivized to protect themselves in their reports. (Sabrow, p.33)

In his research, further, he cites colleague Judith Keilbach, „Not least, it is the impressive interviews in film and TV that shape the behavior of many witnesses of the time speaking up now“ (Sabrow, 2012, P. 299) . This is a very valuable point, as every witness of the time over the years encounters many other reports about the events, which leads to the introduction of biases and inaccuracies to the story, as over time the stories seem to become more homogeneous.

Additionally, due to the extreme circumstances of the time, which in the case of Emmerich will be further detailed in chapter 3.1, some of the witnesses also repress the memory due to the trauma they encountered and never speak up about their experience, further limiting the number of records available.

For all the above reasons, the accounts of witnesses of the time, or Zeitzeugen, have to be assessed with care, as many of them tend to give an inaccurate representation of the times and events. Yet, they still offer the potential to provide rich insights into events, which majority happened outside of written records. The following chapters will try to reflect the memories of the witnesses, while carefully positioning them within the context given.

2.2 The ethics of the allied bombings

In order to be able to comprehend and talk about the devastation done to the city of Emmerich, the circumstance of the time and the Allied mission to free Europe plays a very important role. While this work mainly focuses on the destruction done to the inhabitants of a German town, it is important to acknowledge the time it happened and the atrocities committed by the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) under its leader Adolf Hitler. The Allied mission to free Europe was motivated by the German efforts during the second world war. While fighting on multiple fronts at the same time trying to gain territory while breaking any existing law of human rights, the ongoing holocaust on mainly the Jewish population in Germany became known. While the main target of the Allied mission was to free Europe from the nazi regime that controlled the majority of territory at the time, many bombing raids also killed a high number of civilians in Germany. In a paper published by Ronald Schaffer, mainly on the American military ethics behind the bombing of Germany in WWII, he distinguishes a difference between the American and the British moral guidelines for the bombing. To quote „According to this policy, American airmen were to make selective strikes against precise military and industrial targets, avoiding direct attacks on the populace. (...) It seems to distinguish the United States from such nations as Japan, Germany, and Great Britain, which intentionally attacked civilian-populated areas.“ (Schaffer, 1980). This highlights that even in the eye of an allied partner in the war, the attacks of the British were crossing the border between strategic military attacks and retaliation or attempts to devastate the public. To an extent, this seems understandable, as the British were also a victim of many untargeted bombings through the means of, for example, V2 Rockets. Later in his paper, Schaffer also highlights that these guidelines set for the bombing through the American air force „was so broadly interpreted and so frequently breached as to become almost meaningless “ (Schaffer, 1980). The so-called area bombing, especially used by the British, was part of the „RAF's effort to crush German morale by its "de housing" of German workers“ (Kuehl, 1999). As the bombing raids were directly targeted at breaking the will of the German population, they exceeded to scope of traditional strategic

bombing, which aims to take out infrastructure instead of housing. While this is widely criticized, for example by A. Garret in one of his books, where he claims the bombing not only violated British prewar policy and airpower doctrine but also violated basic ethical standards of war-making.“ (Garret, 1980). Yet, while it can be criticized that the British aimed at breaking the populace as well as the military, it has to be seen in the context of what warfare was in this century. As Daniel Kuehl points out in his review of Garret's book on the war ethics of the British, many parties involved in warfare at the time used cruel techniques to demoralize the public. He claims that „Garrett and the other moralists who single out strat ing for its apparent immorality conveniently ignore other elements of twentieth-century warfare that were far more destructive of civil noncombatant immunity.“ (Kuehl, 1980) and refers to for example sieges by the Germans on Leningrad in 1941-1943 or the British blockade on Germany at the time of the first world war, each costing more than a million lives. Therefore, while this paper focuses on the damage done to a German city, it has always to be taken into account what caused this response on the Germans and that the British were in active warfare with Germany, forcing them to aim for a quick ending to the war.

Chapter 3 - Embrica Desolata

3.1 The 7th of October 1944

In line with the previously described *modus operandi* during the airborne war over Emmerich, in the first years of the war, the bombings were focused on targeted attacks on critical industrial infrastructure. On the 7th of October, the Allied bombings conducted by the British should far exceed the realm of targeted attacks and change the city forever. Figure 7 below shows an Allied aerial image taken after the bombing.



Figure 7 Aerial of Emmerich after the bombing of October 1944

During the day, hundreds of British Lancaster bombers first dropped hundreds of explosive bombs on the city, destroying the majority of the buildings in the city.

Consequently, according to sources hundreds of thousands of incendiary bombs were dropped in the city, causing fires to spread across the entire area.(Tekolf, 1999, p. 37)

In the following chapter, the accounts of eyewitnesses of the bombing will be presented to get a better understanding of the extent of the attack and its long-lasting influence on the face of the city.

In the late 1980s, the local history club of Emmerich decided to reach out to the city to collect records of eyewitnesses of the day of the bombing as well as the time following it. The book, which is called “Emmerich Im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Augenzeugen berichten“, translating to “Emmerich in World War 2, eye-witnesses report“, presents multiple reports of people who experienced the bombing, some of them recorded right after the war, while other have been recorded before the publication. At this point of the war, in the fall of 1944, the Allied mission to free Europe had progressed rapidly closing in on Germany from the west and all remaining resources were focussed on saving the war, written records of the time are very scarce and existing ones have often been lost in the fog of war. As described in Chapter 2.2, these records always need to be assessed with a critical eye, yet they can help to give a human perspective on the events.

One of the accounts presented in “Emmerich Im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Augenzeugen berichten“ stems from Herman Helmes and was recorded shortly after the end of the war. While this does not remove the chance of inaccuracies in the account, the short timespan between the events and the record makes this a relevant source to display the circumstances during and after the bombing.

In his account, Helmes reports about the happenings of the 7th of October 1944. He reports that around 13.00, after repeated air raid alarms in the morning, they could see the close city of Cleve being covered in a cloud of smoke as the result of a British bombing. Further, he details more bombers following this attack, this time aiming at Emmerich. He describes leaving the shelter he found to find his mother in her house, yet according to his words. „I heard heavy anti-airplane guns being shot. As I never heard them before in Emmerich during the war, I expected no good to follow and headed back to the shelter“(Evers, 1989, p. 47). Around 14.10, several around 750 British Lancaster bombers showed top in the sky above Emmerich, dropping 2000 explosive and in the following approximately 700000 incendiary bombs on the city (Tekolf, 1999, p. 37). In Helmes

account, he describes “Hearing the whistles of the bombs through the roaring of the airplane engines and shortly after the explosion“(Evers, 1989, p.47). After losing electricity and therefore lighting in the air raid shelter, Evers and the others with him sat through multiple streaks of explosions, until they saw fire closing in on the building from the street. Helmes remembered screaming to the others in the shelter “Fire Hazard! As soon as the bombs stop dropping, we need to get out of here“ (Evers, 1989, p.37). When they managed to leave the shelter minutes later, Helmes describes the first view of what was left of the city in the following words As I reached the street, for a moment I realized what happened - All around the city was turned to fire and ashes“. While running through the fire to reach the safer waterfront, he describes some of the damage to the buildings that he saw. He describes that even in the buildings which were left standing, windows doors, and even walls were blown out. Regarding the state of most buildings, like the one he assumed his mother to be trapped in, as „burned down to the outer walls and collapsed. (Evers, 1989, p. 48). He also details the cruel scenes he encountered on his way, as he describes “At the Löwentor if only four three survivors, searching for relatives, but I saw more and more burned and suffocated bodies along the debris or hanging out of windows. There won’t ever be feather to record all the cruelty Emmerich suffered to its truth.“ (Evers. 1989, p. 49).

Another account that gives an idea of the before and after and destructive force of the bombing is given by Gotthard Debiel in the same book and was recorded for publication in 1962. He details how not only how the attack caused houses to collapse, but also how the incendiary bombs turned the city into a “sea of flames“, with “heat and suffering for air making people fall unconscious“, while others jumped “into the waters of the Rhine in desperation“(Evers, 1989, p. 39.) on the same page, he also gives some figures regarding the casualties caused by the bombing. According to this source, 575 civilians and 26 soldiers were killed, while around 1000 were wounded.

Based on these accounts, one can get an impression of the state of the city and its inhabitants during the bombing. As most people were either rushing to save their own lives or somehow tried to find their relatives in the chaos, it is understandable that the records of the events are scarce. The following chapter will give a closer look at the state of the city after this day.

3.2 Stunde Null

„*Stunde Null* – this expression is used to indicate the end of the German Nazi regime in 1945 and the beginning of a new Germany. This historical turning point was marked by the re-naming of former Germany in both East and West, and Nazi symbols, institutions, values, and paraphernalia were taken to the tip“ (Larsen, 2022) The term *Stunde Null*, translating to hour zero, in Germany does not stand only for the reconfiguration of politics and society after World War II but also refers to the rebuilding of the built environment in the city. For Emmerich, the effort to recover the city from the British bombing began on the 8th of October 1944, the day after hundreds of British Lancaster bombers had rendered 97 percent of housing unusable. As described in a record of the formerly mentioned Building Cooperative Emmerich, describing the effect the bombing had on the city „What took centuries to build only took seconds to fall into ashes and debris“ (Evers, 1989). According to a record of the Building cooperative, “On the 31st of March 1945, easter Saturday, Canadian allied troops occupied the city. What they found left of the former thriving city, the Embrace Decora, were 680.000 cubic meters of debris and only 441 people that remained living mostly in basements of ruins“ (Tekolf, 1999, p.39)



Figure 8 Sheep grazing on debris with ruins in the background

In the following, a selection of images will illustrate the state of the city after the bombing of October 1944. As described in Chapter 1.1, the two churches framing the waterfront have played an important role in the city's appearance for almost a millennium before World War 2. As figures 9 and 10 below show, little was left of these monuments. Both churches and their towers had been dismantled during the bombing, leaving the religious without an intact center in the city.



Figure 9 Martini Church after the war



Figure 10 St. Aldegundis Church after the war



Figure 11 The remains of the city's hospital



Figure 12 Kass Straße after the bombing, showing the transport of the debris



Figure 13 cleaned Street with mountains of debris left and right

As the two figures above illustrate, the damage to the city exceeded the destruction of housing and industrial facilities, yet all kinds of infrastructure were rendered unusable.

Figure 11 shows the remains of the city's hospital, which was destroyed to the bare outside walls, making it useless to help the people wounded by the bombing. As Figure 12 shows, apart from the buildings being dismantled, the streets were also barely usable as they were filled with the debris of the buildings around. Figure 13 shows the amount of rubble even better, as in this street the debris was already moved off the road at the time the picture was taken. Combined with the accounts of the witnesses presented in the chapter before, these images give an impression of the desolate state the city was in after the 7th of October 1944, giving it the name *Embrica desolata*.

Chapter 4 Reconstruction

4.1 Reconstruction in Germany

In order to give context to the reports of Emmerich's reconstruction, which are going to be presented in chapter 4.2, first this chapter is going to take a look at reconstruction in other German cities, in this case focussing on more major cities in the country. As hypothesized in the introduction of this paper, the assumption is that in the smaller cities like Emmerich, the reconstruction was more resemblant of filling in the existing plots than rearranging the layout of the city according to contemporary ideas of urban planning.

Regarding the general process of reconstruction in Germany, a book overseeing German cities and their history, called "Nationalatlas Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Dörfer und Städte", translating to national atlas of the Bundesrepublik Germany, villages and cities, contains a good description of the overarching principles. According to the article, written by German historian Volker Bode, in many places „ the rapid reconstruction (....) was oriented on the historic layout of the city, as much of the underground infrastructure was still intact and intended to be reused“ (Hahn et al., 2002) In contrast, in the major cities like Berlin, the planners drafted up plans for an entire rearrangement of parts of the city.

In a document published by the Bauhaus archive German, which details the biography of Selman Selmanagić, a Bosnian German architect active at the time of reconstruction, they detail his contribution to the reconstruction. In the following, the example of Berlin will be used to show the how detailed and transforming the reconstruction was in this city.



Figure 14 Berlin after the bombings

According to the above mentioned document, Selmanagic said on his collaboration with Hans Scharoun, the leading city architect of Berlin “We weaned to draft up a new plan for “Big Berlin“, which was inhibited by the Allies. (...) we studied Berlins history from 1200-1945 with the best experts. (...) We knew the development in architecture and its theories in their whole complexity. How could we bring our knowledge to unity?“ (A.Selmanagić, 2018, p. 2). The result of this effort in research and reorganization was the redevelopment plan famously known as the Scharoun Plan, which was never realized, but shows a good inclination of what the leading ideas at the time were. As Figure 15 below shows, they intended to totally reorganize the city according to modernist ideas.

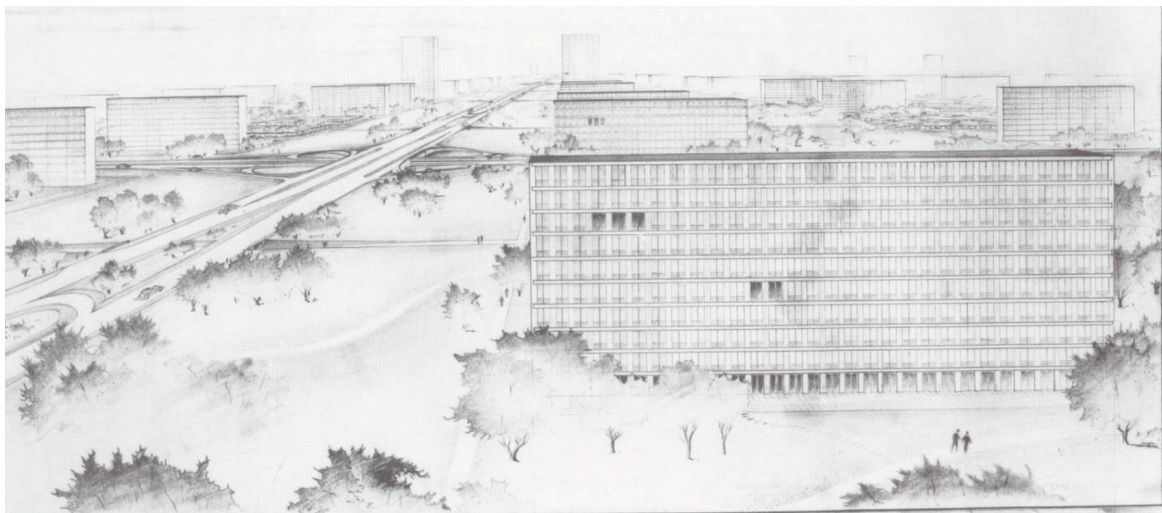


Figure 15 Cityscape according to Plan, drawing by Selmanagić

Although the built reality of the reconstruction is much less drastic compared to the plan, the layout of the city was changed substantially. While in the first 3 years, according the the tenants association Berlin only 188 new houses were built, while 60000 dwellings were restored, the ratio was switched shortly after. (J. Sethmann, 2020). After the year 1950, when financial resources provided by the Marshall Plan reached Berlin, the first truly new built projects were finished. As an example, the Ernst-Reuter-Siedlung, which was the first new built housing project in west berlin after the war, is going to be shown as an example of the new era of housing introduced to Berlin. As much of the area in the city centre was still destroyed during the time, many projects were located around the outskirts of he city. This is in line with contemporary ideas of urban planning, yet in stark contrast to what Chapter 4.3 details about the efforts in Emmerich. It does not only differ

significantly from the housing before in the war in its location, but also the in the typology of housing used. Figure 16 shows typical housing in Berlin pre-war compared to the same location today, featuring mostly commercial functions, as the housing was moved out of the city centre during and after the reconstruction. Figure 17 contrast an image of the Ernst-Reuter Siedlung, showing the contrast between the typology of housing and the quality of living offered to the inhabitants.

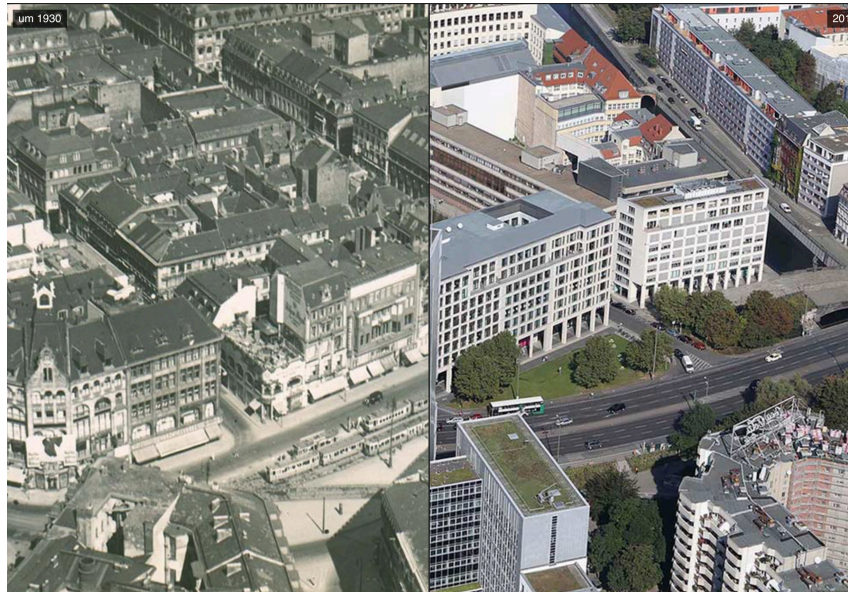


Figure 16 Aerial images around 1930 and 2014



Figure 17 Ernst Reuter Siedlung 2012, outside unchanged since construction in 1955

As the Figures show, due to the presence of skilled urban planners and a higher priority in the allocation of funds, cities like Berlin were able to find opportunity in the transformation of the city and were able to implement contemporary ideas urban planning, like the Garden city concept (Ward, S., 1992). The housing offered larger living spaces and more access to greenery and daylight compared to before and therefore, at the time, not only re-established housing but also improved the quality of life in cities such as Berlin. The next Chapter is going to compare the development in a smaller city, Emmerich, to the transformation of Berlin to draw conclusions about differences and their causes.

4.2 Reconstruction in Emmerich, the record of the Building cooperative

Before, reports of the aforementioned Building Cooperative Emmerich on the efforts and problems of the reconstruction are gonna be presented to help showcase the transformation caused.

Before and in parallel with rebuilding the city, a major effort went into cleaning up the debris of all the destroyed housing. As can be seen in the image below, which was taken approximately in the year 1948, the cleanup took long enough for grass to grow over the debris and people to find ways to utilize the space.

In a book published by the Building Cooperative Emmerich about its history in 1999, its contribution to the reconstruction, and the struggles it encountered in the process are laid out. According to the record of their first members meeting after the war, in total “The grade of destruction counts 97%“ (Tekolf, 1999, p.38). To start the process of re-establishing these dwellings, the Building cooperative led multiple different projects in Emmerich. Their goal in this period had switched from the focus on family homes before the war to „Use the accessible resources to create as much housing as possible“ Tekolf, 1999, p.41) As they report further, due to the grade of destruction in the city, certain areas had to be prioritized. To quote from their record “The reconstruction was focussed on the inner city core. (...) This had good reasoning. The destroyed core of the city still contained working streets and water/energy supply lines, which would have not been the case outside of the center “ (Tekolf, 1999, p. 43).

To give a closer look at the buildings created by the Cooperative, a closer look at one of their projects conducted during the initial reconstruction period will be provided.

The first project finished after the war was located in the van-Gülpen Straße and included 5 buildings in total containing 30 dwellings combined. The architect behind this project was Paul Maria van Aaken, whose contribution to the reconstruction exceeds this role, as will alter be described in Chapter 4.2. Figure 18 below shows an image of the housing during its construction either in 1949 or 1950, the year it was completed, which also

shows the very simple tools available to the builders at the time, especially looking at the wooden scaffolding used to erect the masonry walls.



Figure 18 First project built after the war, van-Gülpen Straße

In order to realize the construction of those projects, the buildings cooperative and to find a bank to finance a loan. According to their record, their first three projects required a budget of 450.000 euros, while their own capital only provided 80.000 euros (Tekolf, 1999, p. 43). According to this source, the local bank was able to provide the funds based on the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan.

The second project in focus is located in the Tempelstraße, where they realized 35 dwellings across two buildings, which were finished in the years 1952 and 1953.

Further insight into the process of reconstruction and the finances behind are provided when the book recites the cost of the project. According to their record, “In 1954, the cooperative was presented with the final bill for the building in the Tempelstraße. The building cost amounted to 493.952 DM for 30 dwellings, on average roughly 16500 DM per dwelling.” (Tekolf, 1999, p. 45-46). This gives an insight into the cost of building at the time, which corrected for inflation equals roughly 1,5 million Euro in today's money. Figure 19 below shows the building after its construction and also shows how the real-world products of the cooperatives target to “not only create the housing needed for the people but also to „take influence on the design of the street- and cityscape“, which aimed

to maintain Emmerich's heritage of craftsmanship in the built environment.“(Tekolf, 1999, p.41)



Figure 19 Housing project Tempelstraße

As the image shows, although the facades of the buildings are mostly done in plain masonry, the volume of the building and its details like the dormer windows or the suggested facade decoration on the capping walls show the connection to the heritage of the city. As the cooperative had members from all sectors involved in the building industry, they could still mobilize the skilled workers left in the region for their projects, allowing them to build housing with comparatively high quality and attention to aesthetics. As will be shown in the following chapter, other building efforts in the city often followed more simple methods due to the available resources.

Chapter 4.3 Before and after the war

One of the best sources regarding the impact of the reconstruction specifically in Emmerich is the book „Emmerich Wie es war - Wie es ist“, which was published by Walter Schleipen, a local publishing company in Emmerich. The book contrasts historic images of the city predating WWII with images taken in the 1960s. This gives a good account of the actual product of the reconstruction after it has been completed. In the following, those images will be assessed to identify patterns in the reconstruction and to identify commonalities between the reconstructed buildings.

The older images shown in the following were collected from inhabitants of the city and the local archives, while the newer images were taken by Nicole Berkowicz-Küpper for this publication.



Images of the Alter Markt, “Old Market“ in the early 20th century compared to an image from the early 1970’s

Visible is a much more uniform look in the rebuilt situation, losing the ornamentation in the initial state.



While some buildings try to pay tribute to the historical situation, the general amount of decoration and individualism is clearly visible

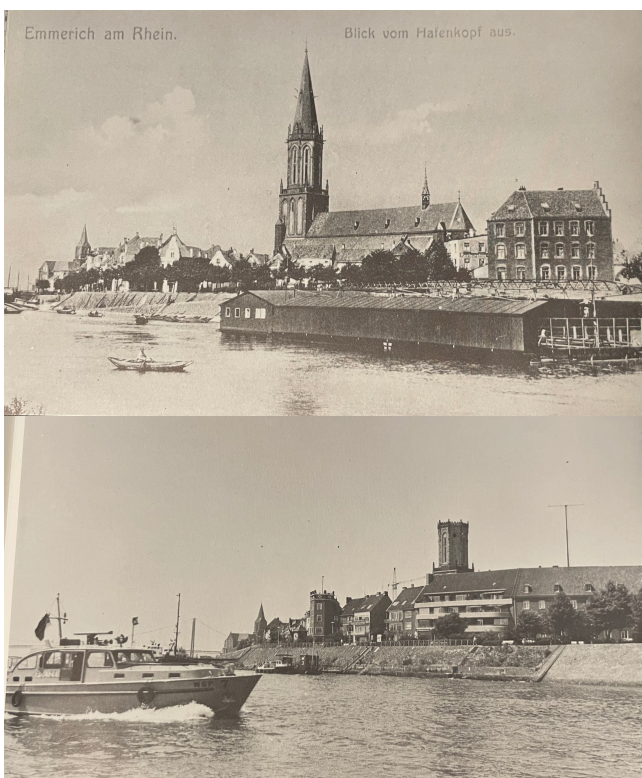
Figure 20 / Figure 21



Images of the Großer Löwe, “Big Lion“, in the early 20th century compared to an image from the early 1970’s

While the well has been replaced almost in the same location, including the little green pad around it, the buildings again are completely reconfigured. Similar to the first example, a clear loss in individuality and ornamentation is visible. This is partially caused by the sheer need to build quick, but also emphasized by the very similar building date of all the reconstructions.

Figure 22 / Figure 23



The city and the waterfront captured from the port site, showing the change in the cities general elevation. Furthermore, a very notable detail is the tower of the St.Alegundis Church in the center of the top image, slightly to the right ion the bottom one. Although the church was rebuilt to return to function, the top of the wore was never replaced. In the historic state those to pointy towers used to frame the waterfront from both sides, which now is not given anymore.

Figure 24 / Figure 25



These two images show the Steinstraße in 1930 and in 1973. Visible is the widening of the street, as well as the already mentioned loss in detail and individuality in the buildings. While the image from 1930 shows buildings with different shapes and facade organizations, in the image from 1973 these were replaced by more generic buildings repeated along the street.

Figure 26 / Figure 27



The last two images show the transformation of the Christophorus street after the war. Apart from widening the streets, here it is also visible that the formerly existing tram line had made space for individual travel by car and bike. Further, it is notable that, considering the images shown, the difference between the streets in the city has also been diminished by the more generic style of architecture used.

Figure 28 / Figure 29

As can be seen in the images, the war had a lasting effect on the face of Emmerich, changing the appearance of its housing forever. This is also the time to look back at the quote starting the introduction of this paper, in which local historian Leo Gies said the following: “After viewing those images, one has to accept that the old *Embrica decora* is definitely a thing of the past. Gone are the well-proportioned, individually designed middle-class houses of a well-situated town. Instead, the image of the city is now ruled by the grid, prefabricated construction pieces, concrete, and cliché “ (Gies,1977). After this closer look at the city before and after the war, it becomes understandable where this notion comes from. In the reconstructed city, a lot of the individuality and the details in ornamentation that characterized the city are gone now. Further, what can be seen from these images is, that apart from widening the streets for the needs of individual transport, the city’s layout has hardly changed through the reconstruction. While in major cities like Berlin or, as shown above in chapter 4.1, Leipzig had overarching plans in place to reshape the city according to contemporary ideas of urban planning, in Emmerich it was more a matter of refilling similar plots. The created buildings also often tried to resemble the volumetric appearance of their predecessors, yet as said lack the individual quality and detail present before.

Chapter 5 Looking Back -

The account of Paul Maria Van Aaken

Paul Maria van Aaken, born in 1905, was the first mayor of the city of Emmerich after the end of WWII. He was elected in 1946 when the British occupying force at the time decided to start handing the governing tasks back to the Germans. He is also the author of one of the main published sources looking back at the process of reassembling society as well as re-establishing the built substance of the city in „Emmerich - Trümmer Aufbau“ (Van Aaken, 1980). This chapter is going to revisit his memories from the time in order to The book was commissioned by the city itself in the late 1970s, as they asked the city's first mayor after the war to reiterate his experience from the years of leading a city in which 97 percent of dwellings were destroyed.

Before revisiting the account of the time by van Aaken, it has to be mentioned that this source was written a bit later. The year 1980, so about 35 years after the end of the war. Therefore, this information should be viewed as a personal account of a witness of the time rather than objective truth. Yet, it still offers valuable insight into the mindset and the resilience of the people at the forefront of reviving a city on the ground.

One of the interesting details of his appointment is that van Aaken, who acted in multiple youth organizations associated with the resistance against the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei) regime, was a master builder by family trait and own education. Although it is not pointed out in the available sources what role this played in his appointment, his education would have been advantageous for the process of reconstruction. Although the book is less focused on architectural quality rather than the struggles of life during the time, his education and passion for architecture led him to comment on some of the choices from an architectural standpoint. For example, van Aaken at the end of the book expresses his disappointment with the way the church tower on the western end of the waterfront boulevard was reconstructed. Specifically, he refers to the lack of the top of the tower removing the framing that used to be given to the waterfront by the churches on both ends of the river. As this book was commissioned as a personal account of van Aaken's experience, it contains much information regarding the

state of life in Emmerich after the war and how hard it was to reinstate society while being under the control of the occupying forces, in this case, the British. To Quote van Aaken on his interactions with the commanding British officer in 1949, „The British man denied every request that could have alleviated some of the sufferings from us. Later I found out his family was killed by a German V2 Rocket months before the war ended“. This highlights the unimaginable tension between the British, on one hand trying to guide Germany to a new start, while on the other hand often being personally devastated by the German actions during the war, as the example above shows.“ Similarly, many of the Germans left in the city being led by the British, have also not only lost their housing but friends and family to the bombings, providing even more tension. Yet due to the clear dependence on the Allied and their mercy to continue existing, the Germans remaining in the city had to follow the British orders. A good example of this dependence is presented by van Aaken when he talks about the process of his election, where he mentions that „Because of the poverty present in Emmerich, unimaginable today, the officer brought pens and paper, enabling the process of the election“ (van Aaken, 1980). This also relates to the rebuilding process, as this extreme poverty and lack of resources also explain why no overarching plans were drafted for the reconstruction. Together with other sources, for example, ones claiming Emmerich as the „most destroyed city in Germany“ to get more help from other parts of the country, these statements have to be taken with a grain of salt, as the cities were in an almost competitive situation to raise help from other parts of the country. Therefore the exact claims can not always be verified, although in this case the record was taken long after the reconstruction, reducing the chance for such embellishment.

Apart from the reconstruction of the built tissue of the city, van Aaken also detailed the struggles of rebuilding society from „hour zero“, as it is often referred to in Germany. As the population of the city, especially in the demographic of young men, was decimated due to the war and every remainder of the power structure was strongly connected to the former regime, the first years after the war was dominated by all kinds of rebuilding efforts, not only spanning the buildings sector but also the society. With the comparative wealth Germany had acquired until the writing of this book, he describes a dissatisfaction with the younger generations, who in his eyes did not value the efforts put in to reach the

comparative wealth they grew up in. In his words „These young men I would have liked to be employed during the reconstruction of our city. Without the chance to earn money or make career, they would have had to show what they got in them, working 14 to 16 hours a day fighting hardship and hopelessness.“(van Aaken, 1980) He then adds that to understand the problems of a fully destroyed city and society, these young men, who grew up on the full tables created by their parents, would have had to live through the time themselves. These statements not only show van Aaken's love and passion for his city but also a feeling of frustration, as younger people seemed to take his life's work for granted. Although this statement has to be taken with care, as the notion of dissatisfaction with the youth is a common phenomenon, the way it is phrased gives an insight into the importance the time of reconstructing city and society had for van Aaken. Still, it has to be said that his generation s much as they are responsible for rebuilding the city, also carries responsibility for the state of the youth at the time.

To conclude his account, it is very valuable to see the words of one of the major figures of the reconstruction, especially as it was written 20 years after the reconstruction, with time to reflect upon the events. Although the account is influenced by the biases created by the circumstances at the time of writing, it still offers a unique insight into the mind of one of the most important figures of the reconstruction of Emmerich.

Conclusion

Looking back at the literature and images presented throughout this paper, it can be said that the 7th of October 1944 can be considered one of the darkest and most transformational days in the city 1200 years the city has existed. What was known as *Embrica decora*, gorgeous Emmerich, was destroyed during the Allied effort to save Europe from the NSDAP regime and its unparalleled atrocities. After the fateful described by the eye-witness quoted here, the city stood in front of the task to rebuild a city in which the majority of buildings were collapsed or no longer usable, then referred to as *Embrica desolata*. For Emmerich, reconstruction was first meant to remove the debris as far as possible, so the existing underground infrastructure for water, sewage, and electricity could be used for the reconstructed buildings. This limited the freedom of redesigning the city to work with the existing grid and plots. While the volumetric appearance of the city has been reinstated in many places, the lack of resources and skilled workers as well as the high demand for housing at once, the individualism and craftsmanship in detail on the buildings significantly diminished after the war. What used to be a city showing traces of centuries of wealth due to thriving trade activity, now appears like a generic version of what it was before. Compared to cities like Berlin, which could utilize the almost white sheet after the war to reorganize the grown structure, Emmerich had to rely on rebuilding close to the state before. While this kept some of the identity of the city, it denied the possibility to make use of more contemporary urban planning ideas to improve the quality of life for the inhabitants. As creating shelter and a home for people was prioritized, this is understandable, yet provides challenges for city planners until today. In retrospect, studying this subject presents an insight into the transformation a city and its people undergoes when hit by war as Emmerich did. Not only did the literature provide insight into the overarching motives and priorities during the reconstruction, but it also allows a look into the mind of some of the major figures for the city at the time.

Discussion

In order to deepen this research and try to validate the hypothesis of more formal reconstruction in the smaller German towns, the first step for further research would be to take comparisons to other cities in the area, for example, Wesel, located 20 kilometers up the Rhine from Emmerich. Wesel also played a major role in the allied missions called Operation Plunder and Operation Varsity. Another interesting angle, which due to time constraints exceeded the scope of this research, as most of the information is not written down, would be to analyze even smaller communities, for example, villages and their history during and after the war. Furthermore, conducting own interviews with witnesses of the time, known as „Zeitzeugen“ in Germany to ask for their experience of the war and the reconstruction. Unfortunately, due to the war being over for almost 80 years and the time period not carrying a kind of taboo reputation, especially in the generation that lived through it, finding matching interviewees is very time intensive. Furthermore, more frequent exchanges with the local archives, which had been made inaccessible due to time constraints and distance, could lead to more insight into the actual plans of buildings during the reconstruction plans or possibly urban planning documents from the time. Unfortunately, in the available material, the time period between the end of the war and the early to mid-1960s is very scarcely recorded, making it hard to identify in some situations what was an initial product of the reconstruction and what was adapted later. Therefore, more intensive contact with other archives in the region that might have documents could help to understand more about the reconstruction, also closing in on a dwelling scale and what it meant for the individual living in the city.

Lastly, one important point of attention in a work like this is that our sources and personal accounts were recorded either during the fog of war, causing trauma-induced uncertainties and certainly biases, or recorded a long time after the actual development. Those later accounts have the chance to remove contemporary biases or the acute hardship of the war, yet they have their own potential to distort information. When a long time passes after an event before a person is asked to record it, it is likely that not all information will be correctly preserved. This issue would also carry through to personal interviews, as the actual development in focus here has been roughly 60 years past by now.

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