



WARSAW: RISING AS A PHOENIX OUT OF PLANNING

FAST FACTS		Similar To
Metropolitan Area Population	2,500,000	Bucharest, Denver, Sapporo
Urban Area Population*	2,000,000	
Urban Land Area: Square Miles	210	Naples, Asheville, Fukuoka, Auckland
Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers	544	
Population per Square Mile	9,500	Zurich, Magnitogorsk, Malaga
Population per Square Kilometer	3,700	
*Continuously built up area http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua.pdf		

11 March 2006



Hard Won Freedom

The street sign says it all. The corner of Solidarity and John Paul II. It would be fitting if the previous street names were Marx and Lenin. Also fitting would be a corner of Thatcher and Reagan, but I did not see that. But Poland's long night is over and the nation is now in the European Union and showing the kind of prosperity that free markets create.

None of this is to suggest that there are not reminders of Stalin, Brezhnev and the lost, captive decades. The core of the city is filled with the Soviet state architectural designs --- gray apartment blocks that emit an impression of cold that is colder than the worst winter here. The

Palace of Culture, in the core of Warsaw, is derived from Stalin's "wedding cake" architecture of the 1950s.

Much of the core of the city was in the infamous ghetto of Warsaw, in which the Nazis concentrated the city's Jews during World War II. It is reported that, at the peak, more than 500,000 people were crowded into this area of little more than two square miles (five square kilometers). The Palace of Culture stands in the southeast corner of this formerly walled city, through which entry or exit was strictly controlled by gates. The ghetto contained much of the Centrum and Wola districts.

Still the Same: What Everyone Owns, No-One Owns

For all of the progress that has been made in Warsaw, not all is well. The suburban railway, for example, has stations that any urban area should be ashamed of. They are fully covered graffiti and are hardly the type of environment likely to attract people from cars. Indeed, they are an example of the famous Polish saying from the period of socialism, that what everyone owns, no-one owns. Decades ago the economist John Kenneth Galbraith wrongly characterized the lesser condition of public facilities and public services as being the result of "public squalor" --- which he attributed to insufficient revenues. He was right on the "squalor" but wrong on the funding. Public facilities tend to be poorly maintained because no-one cares.

Rising Like a Phoenix from Planning

Warsaw is an urban area recovering from planning. There was the planned economy that kept an enterprising people in poverty, while Western Europeans, Americans and Japanese became affluent. But, at least Warsaw is going in the right direction. The metropolitan area is going in the right direction, as people and businesses locate where it is less costly, improving the quality of life. On the other hand, many urban areas in the more affluent Western World are determined to contract the planning disease and their citizens are paying the price in excessively high land prices. The result is that home ownership is likely to fall substantially in the next generation.

The Suburbs Come to Warsaw

Not so in Warsaw. As has become customary, I had inspected the satellite maps of the Warsaw area to identify the sectors that appeared to be the newest developments. I had an idea where to go. But on my way out of the hotel, I checked with concierge about where I might find the new, single-family housing in the suburbs. He said, "it is all around Warsaw, you can go in any direction." He also told me that "everyone is moving to the suburbs."

This reminded me of the buzz a few years ago, when a member of the Congress of New Urbanism e-mail list related how many of his friends had moved into Washington, DC from the suburbs, and how the District's population decline had stopped. It hadn't and it hasn't. But that didn't stop the hosannas of the uninformed. Similar naivety might have caused me to be concerned about getting out of Warsaw's core, stuck in a traffic jam of moving vans blocked by other vans protruding into the street as they load.

But, of course, like impressions from a New Urbanist coffee klatch, the concierge's off-hand statement was not true, though people are leaving Warsaw for the suburbs, just as they continue to leave Washington, DC.

As the concierge said, there are new single-family detached houses in virtually every direction. Warsaw's suburbs look much different than those of America, Canada, Australia or even Western Europe. The streets tend to be very narrow, with no room for parking and little room for two cars to pass. Nearly all of the houses are behind high fences, some masonry and some chain link. Behind each fence it seems that there are big dogs, none of which seemed particularly happy with me and my camera.

The houses are masonry. Unlike German houses, which tend to be smaller, many of the houses in Warsaw's suburbs do not attempt to hide the concrete blocks. Some cover them with stucco, but many do not. Most houses are two floors and some are three.

The most new development identified is to the south, in the exurb of Wolka Kozadawska. There are a wide variety of brand new houses, as would be found in an Australian suburb. There are also sections of tract housing, resembling, at least in concept, American suburbs. The streets are narrower than in the United States and Australia, but much wider than in the new developments to the west, north and east of the city.

There is another major development, to the southwest along Route 8 to Katowice. The houses here, in Stara Weis are a bit larger than in Wolka Kozadawska.

Even in the city itself, there are many single-family detached houses, especially toward the fringe. There are also two-story row houses under construction, virtually all with garages.

The Post-Socialist Market

Warsaw may also be the principal battleground of the big box retailers. Here Carrefour, Auchan, Macro, E. Leclerc, Lindl, Real, Selgross, Geant and Tesco compete for the zloty being ignored by Wal-Mart and Costco. This is highly unusual. In most of the world's major urban areas, there will be two or at most three of these players, but not nine. I am advised that the stores are open every day, which is very unusual for Europe. There is a complete array of specialty big box retailers, such as LeRoy Merlin, OBI, Decathlon, Go Sport, IKEA, Comforama and Costorama. Interestingly, the Norwegian petrol company, Statoil also markets in the area.

On the western side of the city, a new information technology corridor appears to be developing, connected to the "Blue City" shopping area.

Warsaw: Spreading Out

The urban area (area of continuous urbanization) itself is still comparatively compact, at 210 square miles. However, the urban fabric has jumped well beyond these bounds, as people and companies take advantage of low priced land close to the urban area. A conservative estimate

suggests that a radius of at least 15 miles around Warsaw's core is now principally urban, suggesting that the urban area could be headed toward 700 square miles.

The streets are very wide, as is typical of the triumphal streets in Soviet cities. Given their aversion to cars, the extremely wide streets seem out of place. Perhaps the Soviet leaders had read Mises, whose pre-1917 volume *Socialism* showed that communism would eventually fall of its own weight. Maybe they were making provision for the inevitable cars that would follow as a post-communist society became more affluent. Or maybe they believed that the day would come when communism would actually produce affluence.

An acquaintance at a Paris conference told me that Warsaw was not very interesting --- that the old town is small (which it is) and the rest was Stalinist mixed with 21st century architecture. He was right about that too. Fortunately, the new large post-modern buildings are being placed in a dispersed manner throughout the city. This means that the ample road infrastructure should be able to handle the traffic for some years to come, which will not be as concentrated toward the core as it would have been if planners had forced all the new construction within a "stone's throw" of the Palace of Culture.

The Difference between Urban Areas and Museums

It is not unusual for residents of Warsaw say that there is little of tourist value in their urban area. Everyone's favorite place in Poland is Krakow (<http://www.rentalcartours.net/rac-krakow.pdf>). Krakow's core is more attractive for its medieval architecture, which was preserved in tact because the city was not destroyed in World War II. A small part of the Warsaw core has been rebuilt. Katowice-Gliwice-Tichy (<http://www.rentalcartours.net/rac-katowice.pdf>) is of considerable disinterest to tourists, as an an industrial age (post medieval) urban area, more akin to Birmingham, Manchester or Essen-Dusseldorf (<http://www.rentalcartours.net/rac-rrw.pdf>). However, it is an oversimplification to dismiss Warsaw or even Katowice-Gliwice-Tichy as inferior to Krakow. Outside the small historic cores, the urban areas look remarkably similar. The same is true throughout much of Europe. All of the large urban areas have grown far beyond the historic cores.

Thus, when Krakow is praised and Warsaw or Katowice-Gliwice-Tychy dismissed, the commentary focuses on history, not the present. This is, of course, what makes such areas interesting for tourists. The mistake occurs when tourists, or worse, urban planners return home wanting to remake their cities in a manner that not even Europeans have built for centuries. They see crowded tram cars (street cars) and presume that people have chosen them over automobiles. The truth is that, for the most part, people buy cars as soon as they can afford them.

It is the difference between urban areas and museums. The attractive European cores are outdoor museums that are unrepresentative of how people live on the continent. For decades, virtually all of the growth in European urban areas, as well as Japanese urban areas has been more similar in form to the suburbs of Melbourne or Los Angeles than to the core of Krakow or Barcelona. Anyone interested in seeing the Europe of today can see this reality by driving just a few miles away from the historic cores.

DRIVING IN POLAND

National Speed Limit: The national speed limit outside cities is 90 kilometers per hour (approximately 55 miles per hour).

Motorways or Autoroutes: On motorways or autoroutes the speed limit is 130 kph (81 mph). Traffic moves at 140 to 150 kph and it is not unusual for cars to pass at 160 kph (100 mph). Generally, there are no speed signs except where the speed limit is below 130 kph.

Divided Highways: On four lane divided highways (dual carriageways) Traffic tends to flow at 110 to 120 kph, or 20 to 30 kph above the limit. On four-lane divided highways (not motorways or autoroutes), there are frequent 70 kph zones at crossroads and pedestrian crossings. The police monitor these closely, often sitting to the side of the road, sometimes hidden. There appears to be little patrol on the 90 kph sections. Generally, there are no speed signs except where the speed limit is below 90 kph.

Two-Lane Intercity Roads are not recommended for travel due to heavy truck traffic. A motorway, autoroute or divided highway alternative will often be faster, even if it is longer.

General Comment on Speed Enforcement: Like many European countries, speed enforcement seems to be considerably more lax than in the United States, Canada or Australia. However, being caught at 40 kph or more above the speed limit is considered a serious offence. The best advice on speed is to generally travel no faster than the fastest prevailing traffic, while complying with any speed limit below 90 kph.

<http://www.rentalcartours.net>
<http://www.demographia.com>
<http://www.publicpurpose.com>

Corner, Solidarity & Jean-Paul II



What Everyone Owns, No-one Owns
Typical Suburban Rail Station



Eastern Suburbs



Eastern Suburbs



Southeast Suburbs



Southeast City





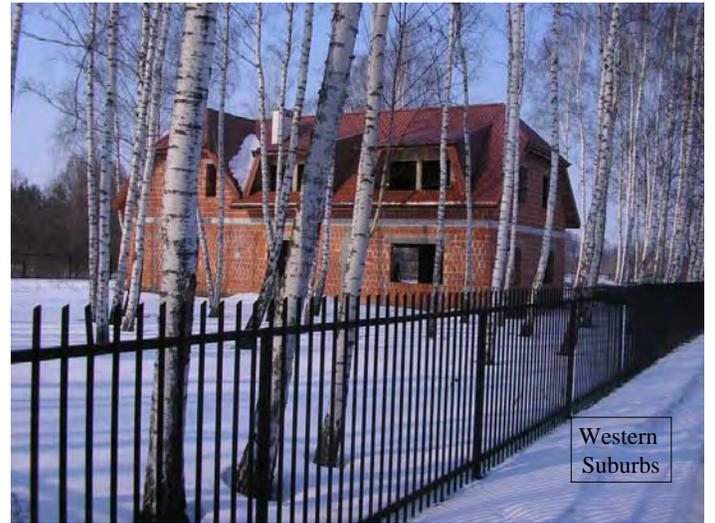
Southeast City



Western Suburbs



Northern Suburbs



Western Suburbs



Southern Suburbs:
Wolka Kozadawska



Southern Suburbs:
Wolka Kozadawska

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Wolka Kozadawska



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Wolka Kozadawska



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Southern Suburbs:
Stara Weis



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Centrum Janki: Junction of Katowice & Krakow Highways



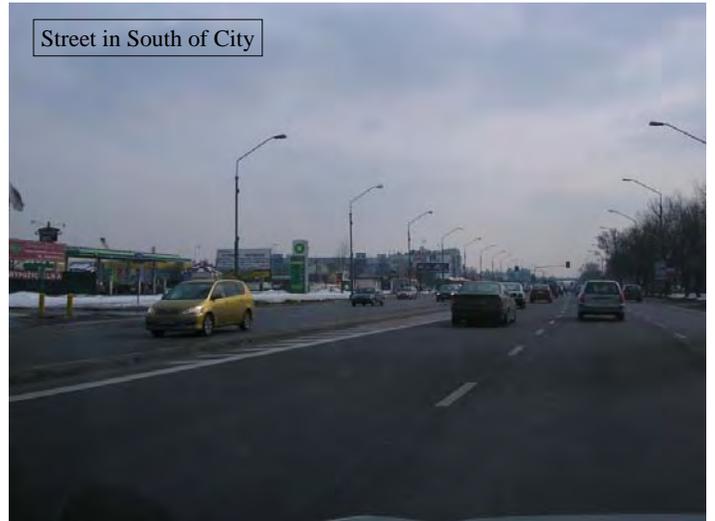
Arkadia Center: City
(Parking Decks Underneath)



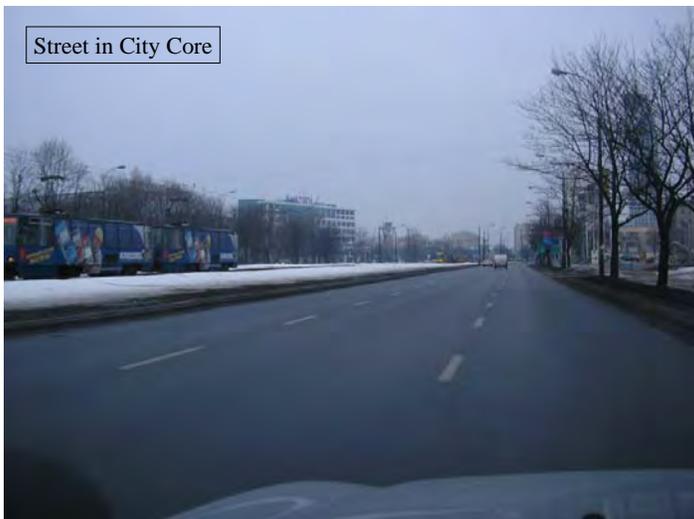
Big-Box Mall Area: Eastern Suburbs



Street in South of City



Street in City Core



Parking in Warsaw





Old City



Stalinist
Apartment
Blocks



Stalinism and
Later Affluence



Palace of Culture
& Post Modern Buildings



Palace of Culture
Stalinist "Wedding
Cake" Architecture



The Warsaw Ghetto