When one visits European cities today, it is hard to imagine that most of them lay in ruins in 1945, with formless heaps of rubble standing where there were once city blocks. The enormous effort to rebuild was also seriously constrained by lack of building materials, destroyed industries, absence of financial liquidity, disorganized labor and countless other major challenges. It was necessary to set up priorities in order to properly and efficiently allocate precious resources. Everyone agreed that it was important to build housing for the millions of displaced citizens. But should one prioritize affective attachments and rebuild people’s houses as they were before the war, following the historic street pattern? Or should one prioritize speed of construction and efficiency and treat cities as a *tabula rasa* on which to lay out a modern car-friendly street grid with prefabricated housing tower blocks? How many resources should go to restoring monuments in the effort to restore civic identity, pride and faith in the future? The debates about setting such priorities were both intensely local and international, as preservationists, architects, planners and politicians looked to their counterparts in other cities and countries for successes and failures to point to. Ambrogio Annoni (1882-1954) entered this highly charged debate with a refreshing idea: the priorities should be set on a case-by-case basis. Annoni argued that WWII had changed the reality on the ground to such an extent, that it had rendered prewar theories obsolete. It was important not to try to fix new problems with old solutions. One had start fresh, from the perspective of practice, assessing what was left of each building to see what could be reasonably be done with it, given all the constraints—material, technological, cultural, financial and ethical. New theories would follow, as preservationists eventually would try to derive more general principles from individual cases, but it would take time. It was unreasonable, he thought, to insist say on a stylistic restoration if the monument has been entirely pulverized. But if it turned out that most of it was still there, save for a missing element here and there, then restoration could be undertaken. Annoni placed a heavy emphasis on material authenticity. He saw the extant material fabric of buildings as the determining factor for setting criteria for preservation. He was opposed, for instance, to building replicas such as those undertaken according to Boleslaw Bierut famous six-year plan for the reconstruction of Warsaw. Nevertheless, he argued that it was important to reconstruct cities in such a way as to restore their pre-war scale and aesthetic character, interpreted in a modern idiom. Annoni practiced as a preservation architect within the Italian government’s Soprintendenza ai Monumenti from 1910 to 1926, and taught at the Politecnico di Milano. He directed major projects for the restoration of churches and important buildings in Ravenna, Milan, Pavia and elsewhere.

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