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# First International Conference on the History of Urban and Regional Planning: A Report

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The first international conference on the history of urban
and regional planning was held at Bedford College, University of London,
September 14-18, 1977.  It was promoted by the History of Planning
Group which has been meeting at the University of Birmingham under the
direction of Professor G. Cherry and has provided both a forum for
discussion and a means of contact between scholars working in this field.
Organised by Dr. A. Sutcliffe, the conference brought together academics
and practising planners from Europe, North America and Japan for five
days of lectures, discussions and excursions.  The proceedings were
opened by Sir John Summerson who examined "The Sources of John Nash's
Plans      for Regent's Park."  He not only reminded the conference
that it was often necessary to delve back in time and search widely for
the origins of town planning concepts and models, but also introduced
visitors to the immediate urban environment in which the conference would
be taking place.  The relationship between such individual schemes and
the general growth of planning traditions and attitudes, and the parallelism
of such developments in different countries was the theme of the second
of the introductory addresses from Professor G. Albers.  In his lecture
on "Town Planning in Germany:  Change and Continuity Under Conditions of
Political Turbulence," he reflected on these parallels which he saw as
emanating from the common experiences affecting the industrial nations,
notably the economic depression of the 1930s, the strength of planning's
professional and technical tradition and the growing international exchange
of ideas and information.  In the subsequent discussion it became clear
that consideration of these international differences and parallels would
provide the dominating themes of the conference.

On the first full day of the conference working sessions were
devoted to the examination of the rise of planning in the nineteenth

century and immediately members were involved in consideration of the
definition of planning as an historical term. Professor J. Cuillier
in her paper "Urban Social Planning and Mobility: New Forms of Social
Order in the Early Nineteenth Century City" argued, from American
experience, that even prior to the development of professional administrative
techniques planning did in fact exist and that its organisational form
was derived not simply from the nature of a "problem" confronted but from
the nature of the social dialogue in existence at the time. During the
same session devoted to economic and social planning in antebellum U.S.A.,
Professor D.R. Goldfield in his paper "Planning for Urban Growth in the
Old South" demonstrated that planning is not necessarily the result of
public control or ideals but can arise from business necessity as in the
Old South where a relatively small group of the commercial elite controlled
the process from formulation to implementation. However, as the subsequent
discussion highlighted, while Professor Cuillier believed that there was
a watershed in the evolution of planning and ideas of social organisation
with the maturation of the manufacturing system, Professor Goldfield felt
that the development demonstrated a difference of degree not kind. With
the second set of papers in this session members turned from the problems
of expanding towns to the examination of settlement planning as experienced
in North America. Professor N. Pressman in his paper "The Canada Company
and Urban Settlement Patterns in Nineteenth Century S.W. Ontario: The
Case of Goderich" provided a detailed examination of the sources of
influence on the organisation and design of a colonial settlement.
Professor J.W. Reps discussing "The Forgotten Frontier: Urban Planning
in the American West Before 1890" illustrated not just the ubiquity of
the gridiron model but also proposed, through his case study of Mormon
settlement, his contention that in the extension of the frontier in
Western America everywhere towns were established as the vanguard of
settlement and that these led the way and shaped the structure of society
rather than merely following and responding to the needs of an agrarian
population for markets and points of distribution. It was a thesis
which many members argued was applicable in other theatres of colonial
expansion.

Having considered the response to urbanisation in the early nineteenth century, the members of the conference attending this working session turned their attention to the rise of modern town planning in the period 1870-1914 with five papers providing the basis for wide ranging comparison of theoretical and practical responses. Professor M. de Sola Morales provided an examination of the doctrinal contribution of "Ildefonso Cerda and the Plan of Barcelona" as the most articulated and complete expression of a type of urban planning that had enormous impact in the Mediterranean countries during the second half of the nineteenth century. In response to this theoretical model Professor P. Breitling discussed "The First City Extension Competititions in Nineteenth Century Germany and Austria," considering them both as reflections of current urban planning ideals and in terms of their consequence as relating the aims of town planning on the one hand and town planning practice on the other. A salutory balance to the response of German governmental authorities to planning ideals was presented by Professor D. Calabi in her paper on "The Genesis of Town Planning Instruments in Italy, c. 1850-1914," arguing that the historical sequence of industrialisation, urbanisation and birth of modern town planning, which was often viewed as the basis of a new urban science, was of doubtful applicability to Italy where there was a failure to use codified town planning instruments and a lack of interest in the creation of a systematic theoretical discipline. If the conflict between planning ideals and practice had been the concern of the three preceding papers, it was to the conjunction of beauty and utility that members turned their attention with Professor W.H. Wilson's paper on "The Ideology, Aesthetics and Politics of the City Beautiful Movement." It was, however, he argued a movement within the mainstream European tradition of city extension, for its practitioners proposed no alternative to the city but accepted that the reality of urbanisation required a fresh examination of the city and the needs of its inhabitants. A continuation of this consideration of the transfer of the European, and particularly German, experience to America was provided in Professor F. Mancuso's detailed analysis of "The Origins and Implications of Zoning: From Germany to the U.S.A." He argued that zoning was not merely a technical

or neutral instrument of planning, but rather a device that was functional
to the composition of socio-political and economic conflicts within
cities and that in its diffusion to America zoning found its most
sophisticated application. The papers in this session thus served to
emphasise the extent to which national variations in economic, social
and political organisation affected the role of planning and the response
to it in these formative years.

From the generalist to the particular members moved to the
consideration of individual planners and their formative influence on
the practice and discipline of planning. Professor C. Collins presented
a paper on "Camillo Sitte Reappraised" which served to update the conclusions
of herself and Professor G.R. Collins in their book Camillo Site and the
Birth of Modern City Planning. She questioned whether the Sittesque as
a mode of analysis was a uniquely modern phenomenon or whether it was a
mode of analysis in planning endemic, surfacing from time to time in
history. Yet if his role was open to reappraisal, the contribution of
Sitte was recognised; on the other hand it seemed that Dr. H. Meller
with her work on "Patrick Geddes as an International Prophet of Town
Planning Before 1914" was serving to rehabilitate a figure whose
significance was questioned and whose ideas had been consistently mis-
understood and denigrated. Yet, as Dr. Meller argued, the writings and
ideas of Geddes, like those of Sitte, had considerable relevance for
current planning ideology and practice. Continuing these detailed
studies, the session closed with papers on planning in two cities.
Professor F.J. Costa in his paper on "Public Planning in Rome from 1870
to the First World War" demonstrated that public planning in Rome after
1870 took on an entirely new dimension resulting from the absorption of
the city into the new Kingdom of Italy in that year as Rome's new rulers
moved rapidly into the task of reshaping the city for the new activities
associated with the capital of a nation. He illustrated the mixture of
success and failure associated with the implementation of the plans and
the pluralistic nature of the decision making process relative to the
preparation and adoption of the plans. By way of comparison Professor
H. Kawakami examined "The Tokyo City Improvement Programme, 1884-1918,"

whose motive was to transform the feudal infrastructures into modern ones which would accommodate capitalistic economic development.  He demonstrated how the great improvement programme which was planned was cutback and changed into smaller emergency projects.  With these final papers of this working session the conference was reminded again of the international parallels to be considered in the history of planning.

Meanwhile, the second working session was devoted to the topic of planning and conservation.  Dr. S. Muthesius outlined "The German Conservation Movement to 1914," concentrating on the development of the underlying visual concepts of simplicity, quietness and traditional village life that were later to be adopted into the National Socialist ideology.  In extension of this theme Professor T. Zarebska dealt with "The Reconstruction of the Historic Area of Kalisz from the 1914 Disaster." She showed how emergent Polish nationalism and German expansionism produced conflicting plans for rebuilding during the war and how the post-war triumph of the former provided a model approach to rebuilding that was copied after the much greater destruction of World War II.  This aspect of recent concern for historic environments was dealt with by Dr. R. Kain in his paper on "Conservation Planning in France:  Policy and Practice in the Marais, Paris," which emphasised conservation's economic and social background in its impact on property values, rents and consequently the social geography of safeguarded areas.  This concern was reflected in Mr. F. Sandbach's paper on "The National Parks Campaign in the Lake District, 1931-1936," though the emphasis here was on the pressure groups fighting the battle for conservation.  The perspective was broadened beyond the developed industrial nations to encompass the problems of the developing world with Professor C. Tunnard's consideration of "Planning and Conservation in the Katmandu Valley," which focussed on the conflicts between twentieth century technology and traditional culture.  This conflict inherent in conservation was further examined by Professor N. Evenson in her paper "The City as an Artifact:  Building Control in Modern Paris" which demonstrated the alternative demands of the preservation of the historic environment and of the prosecution of 'progress' in the form of new office blocks.  The session had clearly opened up the

issue of the relationship of planning history and planning practice.

Consideration of this continuum was maintained during the session devoted to new towns. Mr. W. Houghton-Evans in his paper on "Schemata in British New Town Planning" discussed the architectural habit of searching for an ideal form through the plans for new towns and prompted the question of whether it was not the process of compromise that shaped the reality that was more important than the process of design that shaped the ideal. The implications of this issue were explored in a different context with the contribution of Professor P. Merlin on "Les Villes nouvelled françaises de la conception au début de la réalisation." He demonstrated the role of demographic and commercial pressures on the development of a new town policy in France and posed many points of comparison with the British experience. The impact of planning strategies for decentralisation was explored by Dr. R.J. Smith in his paper on "New Towns and Decentralisation: The History of a Policy in Britain and the U.S.A., 1909-1970," when he contrasted Britain's success relative to that of the U.S.A. The conference was again moving into the realm of planning critique as distinct from planning history narrowly conceived.

The historical dimension, though, was reasserted during the working session on planning in the inter-war years. Professor B.A. Brownwell's paper on "Urban Planning and the Motor Vehicle in the United States in the Early Twentieth Century" focussed on the interaction between the professionalisation of town planning and the introduction of the automobile. He argued that American urban development was significantly affected by the impact of the automobile since the trend towards a technically orientated and conservative notion of planning coincided with, and was further strengthened by, the arrival of the motor car. Moving from the impact of economic transportational factors on urban planning to the influence of individuals between the wars, Professor G. Cherry considered "The Place of Neville Chamberlain in British Town Planning." He demonstrated how as mayor Chamberlain's vigorous implementation of statutory planning set a crucial national precedent, while as an M.P. and later as Minister of Health he advocated decentral-isation as a planning strategy and reinforced local government's role as

a planning authority. In so doing he exerted a lasting influence on British planning. By way of comparison, Dr. J.R. Mullin analysed "Planning in Frankfurt-am-Main Under the Weimar Republic" and examined the role of the city's chief planner, Ernst May, who was a dynamic and politically committed figure. He aimed beyond mere physical planning to the creation of a new and more equitable social milieu, and though he failed to achieve this objective, his role was important as a synthesiser of innovative planning practice. The papers in this session provided the basis for consideration of the relative importance of individuals in the formulation of planning policies and practice.

The session on planning and housing reform opened with two contrasting papers. Dr. F. Bollerey and Dr. K. Hartmann in their paper "Wohnungsreform in Deutschland um die Jahrhundertwende: das Beispiel einer patriarchalischen Utopie" stressed the continuity between housing and planning in Germany. The Garden City concept contributed significantly to this continuity, as was demonstrated through the case studies of Hellerau and Falkenberg. Professor P. Marcuse presented a different picture in the U.S.A. when he discussed "Housing Policy and City Planning: The Puzzling Split in United States Urban History, 1890-1940." A series of initiatives, from the City Beautiful of 1893 to the New York Regional Plan of 1931, professed a concern with housing, but, as Marcuse demonstrated, this was lost and even directly contradicted in implementation. The second part of the session was concerned with Great Britain. Professor P.J. Smith, through a study of "Planning Concepts in the Improvement Schemes of Victorian Edinburgh," investigated the relationship between urban renewal and the mainstream of planning. The schemes in Edinburgh illustrated the successful evolution of renewal policies at this early date as renewal became accepted as a responsibility of local government. Professor J.N. Tarn in his paper "Housing Reform and the Emergence of Town Planning in Britain Before 1914" presented a broader picture of the evolution of planning, tracing the relationship of early town planning and housing. It was argued that while planning has since gone beyond the scale of housing the link remains: it is still the role of planning to provide a setting for the home.

In the session devoted to planning in the third world, planning as an expression of colonial policy was the theme common to the first three papers. Mr. J. Collins spoke on "Lusaka: Urban Planning in a British Colony, 1931-1964," arguing that the imported values of the colonial power were manifested in the city's physical form. As a result, planning in colonial Lusaka was by its very nature unable to accommodate the needs of an increasingly urban majority in the population. Miss S.M. Cunningham noted in her paper "Brazilian Cities Old and New: Planning and Experiences" that the Portuguese had early established a strong urban tradition in Brazil, but despite this there had never been a well developed planning policy there. A more general overview of the relationship between colonialism and planning was offered by Mr. A.D. King in his consideration of "Exporting 'Planning': The Colonial and Neo-colonial Experience, 1877-1977," when he stressed the methodological and theoretical gains to be made by studying those mechanisms which enabled the "westernisation of other people's environments." By way of example, Dr. S.J. Watanabe presented a paper on "Garden City Japanese Style: The Case of the Garden City Co. Ltd., 1918-1928." Documenting an example of private citizens in a newly industrialising nation borrowing western planning concepts for their own use, he explained how the Garden City idea was transmuted to fit the needs of the society which adopted it. The session had made abundantly clear the central importance of the dispersion of ideas in the development of planning theory and practice.

The session on rural and regional planning was opened by Professor W.L. Creese with a discussion of "The Development of the Tennessee Valley Authority" in which he emphasised the Authority's use of the technology of the 1930s to achieve social objectives, halting the erosion of the valley and its communities. The significance of this activity as an expression of Roosevelt's regional policy was subsequently considered alongside the implications of Professor A. Mioni's paper on "Territorial Planning in Italy, 1880-1940" which illustrated agricultural improvement and new towns in the Agro Pontino in Italy. Mioni outlined the phases of intervention by private and government agencies, culminating in the Fascist state which implemented the Agro Pontino project. The

remaining papers considered regional planning in Germany. Dr. W.
Hofmann analysed "The Development of Regional Government and Planning
in the Area of Greater Berlin, 1860-1920," relating the phases in the
city's growth to successive attempts to intervene and direct growth
at a regional level. Dr. D. Rebentisch discussed "Regional Planning in
the Rhein/Main Area, 1890-1945," describing the introduction of planning
initiatives at a regional level after the First World War. It was a
policy continued by the Nazis, though its prosecution was hampered by
the conflicting demands of agrarianisation and industrial development.
From their various aspects the papers had served to emphasise the often
blurred distinction between planning as urban design and as regional
intervention.

With the final session the conference reflected on the question
of "Planning: Has it been worth it?" Dr. R. Fischman chronicled the
conflicts inherent in the modern city between collective action and
individual initiative in his paper on "The Anti-Planners: The Contemporary
Revolt Against Planning and its Significance for Planning History." He
argued that historians of the city had tended to assume that planning
was one of the progressive forces in modern society. Yet he felt that
in reality it had become harder to assert this optimistic conclusion with
any confidence, as the historians of history had to learn from anti-
planners. Finally the subject was broadened from that of the concerns
of the historian of planning to the questioning of the validity of the
very concept of planning in a thought-provoking paper by Professor G.
Piccinato on "Ideology and Realities of Town Planning in the Nineteenth
and Twentieth Centuries." His argument that the history of planning had
in fact been constructed on a basis of ideological "prejudices" aroused
considerable discussion amongst members as to whether the history of
planning could remain within its self-imposed confines or whether, as the
subject and the Group developed their terms of reference, the history of
planning would have to become involved in the study of planning function
and theory.