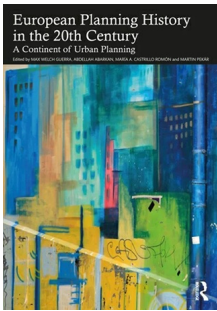


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Max Welch Guerra, Abdellah Abarkan, María A. Castrillo Romón,
Martin Pekár (eds.)

European Planning History in the 20th Century

Review by: Christoph Strupp



Editors: Max Welch Guerra, Abdellah Abarkan, María A. Castrillo Romón, Martin Pekár

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The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been centuries of cities. Urbanisation, which began with industrialisation, meant that 29 per cent of people in Europe were already living in cities by 1890. With the growth of cities came the question of political and administrative control of this process. The first modern urban planning concepts were reform concepts aimed at correcting the visible shortcomings of rapid urban growth at an early stage – for example, the model of the garden city, which originated in England in 1898 but was particularly popular in Germany in the inter-war period. The Athens Charter of 1933, with its model of the segregated, car-friendly city, shaped the reconstruction and redevelopment of many European cities after the Second World War. From the late 1980s, criticism of the undesirable developments associated with this was taken up by New Urbanism.

The history of urban planning has been attracting attention for several decades and has become a flourishing field of research in its own right. However, there is still a need for research in many areas and this anthology, which is the result of a doctoral programme «urbanHIST» funded by the European Union from 2016 to 2020, fills one of these gaps. Max Welch Guerra, Senior Professor of Spatial Planning and Spatial Research at the Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, and his three co-editors from Karlskrona (Sweden), Valladolid (Spain), and Kosice (Slovakia), have dedicated themselves to the history of European planning in the long twentieth century. Their aim is to uncover planning traditions in other,

smaller European countries, especially the socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe, in addition to the countries of England, Germany and France and their canonical classics, which are often used as models and role models. In doing so, they explore the interdependencies and mutual influences in Europe. They also want to strengthen the historiography of urban planning with a view to its future. By revealing historical traditions and important changes in the relationship between urban planning, politics and society in the course of the twentieth century, they aim to encourage self-reflection on the part of current and future urban planners. In his introduction, Welch advocates a «polynuclear» historiography beyond great European men and hierarchical structures – Europe as a centre and model for the rest of the world – a position also taken in the influential Routledge Handbook of Planning History, edited in 2018 by Delft-based architectural and urban historian Carola Hein.

The articles in the volume are divided into three sections, each with eight essays: In the first part, the contributions shed light on the historical background of urban planning in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries up to the interwar period. Several essays on Spain broaden the perspective beyond the major countries mentioned above. The second part deals with the «functions and practices of urban planning in changing social orders». Geographically, the focus is on Sweden, France and Great Britain in the West, and on Slovakia, the CSSR, the GDR and the Soviet Union in Central and Eastern Europe. Thematically, the framework conditions for planning in the changing political systems of democracy and dictatorship play an important role. The third part deals with «interpretations» of European planning history. This includes the question of common European traditions and concepts as well as alternative sources and innovative methods such as the mapping of urban planning over time.

In the first part, Helene Bihlmaier analyses early manuals of urban planning and how the authors dealt with the historical legacy of urban planning. She focuses on German and British publications, including works by Josef Stübben, Rudolf Eberstadt, Alfred Richard Sennett and Raymond Unwin. While history provided canonical models and illustrative examples, it also served to legitimise the scientific nature of modern urban planning. Dirk Schubert discusses, also with a focus on Britain and Germany, the importance of the nineteenth-century hygiene movement for the beginnings of urban planning – the construction of modern water supply and sewerage systems, the elimination of slums that were considered a health hazard, and the development of modern city centres. Noel Manzano reveals another strand of urban planning by highlighting processes of «informal urbanisation» in the poorer suburbs of Madrid and Paris in the first half of the twentieth century – official urban planning sought to prevent such processes as far as possible by subjecting urban space to its specifications.

In her institutional history of the schools of architecture in Madrid and Barcelona, María Cristina García-González analyses the lessons and European models that could be applied to urban planning in Spain. María Castrillo Romón and Miguel Fernández-Maroto highlight the special importance of and interest in the «International Housing and Town Planning Congresses» in Spain in the 1920s, which played an important role in the international networking of urban planners. Spanish delegates attended every year and the congress reports were even translated into Spanish, but the authors also make clear that notions of a linear transfer of ideas from the international level to the respective countries do not hold water; instead, the ideas discussed there were adapted to local conditions at the national and local levels. Alberto Sanz Hernando's article on Pedro Bidagor Lasarte (1906-1996) is one of the few that focuses on an individual. After 1945, Bidagor was a key figure in Spanish urban planning during the Franco regime, but he was less influenced by the fascist ideas of the 1930s and drew on republican and European traditions in his concepts. The cataloguing and digitisation of his archives in Madrid since 2002 has made it possible to study him in depth and to reassess his work.

The last two articles of the first part deal with France and Germany. Laurent Coudroy de Lille outlines the significance of the French town planning law of 1919 and 1924 (the *Cornudet Law*), which remained in force until 1967 despite the political upheavals, and which was based on the principles of planning, beautification and expansion. The author uses Angers in western France, the Paris suburb of Vitry-Sur-Seine and the port city of Marseille in the 1920s and 1930s to illustrate how the law worked in practice. Marcelo Sagot Better focuses on the 1929 «Wohnung und Werkraum» exhibition of the reformist Deutscher Werkbund in the Silesian city of Breslau in the east of the German Reich. The exhibition was widely covered by the media, served as a forum for the exchange of ideas on a European level and was also intended to be a cultural signal for modern housing development in the East.

The second part offers a mix of broader chronological overviews of planning processes in individual countries and more specialised topics. The former category includes Ann Maudsley's contribution on housing in Sweden from the 1920s to the 1990s, which was oriented towards the goals of the welfare state. Martin Pekár's study of the Slovakian capital Bratislava during the fascist era (1939-1945), in which German and Italian models influenced ideologically motivated redevelopment plans for a new university district and a new government district, is narrower in scope. Víctor Pérez-Eguíluz's article also deals with a particular aspect of the history of planning: the protection of urban heritage in France through the *Secteurs Sauvegardés*, introduced in 1962, and other protection instruments such as the *Zones de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural Urbain*, introduced in 1983. Peter J. Larkham discusses the tense relationship between sometimes comprehensive and radical new planning and the preservation of urban heritage in his review of the reconstruction of war-damaged British cities after 1945.

Azmah Arzmi uses written planning documents and specialist journals to examine urban planning in the socialist states of the CSSR and the GDR, which followed centralised guidelines in both countries but differed in terms of spatial scale. Elvira Khairullina and Luis Santos y Ganges contribute an essay on tram systems in Soviet, East German and Czechoslovakian medium-sized cities in the 1960s and 1970s. In the socialist states, too, public transport planning had to contend with ideas of the modern city as car-friendly, but followed individual strategies. Federico Camerin presents the method of construction-emptying-regeneration analysis, which he applies to the planning of space-intensive land uses, e.g. for the construction of industrial, military or railway facilities and the subsequent reuse of the sites. His main concern is to critique the capitalist logic behind these processes. The section concludes with an article by Juan Luis de las Rivas on sustainable urban planning in the late twentieth century and its historical antecedents, the *long durée* of good planning ideas and their potential for linking history, theory and practice in urban design.

The «interpretations» of the third part begin with Stephen V. Ward's reflections on common European elements in the history of planning. Ward does not question the unifying elements resulting from the emergence of transnational transport and communication infrastructure in the nineteenth century, imperialism, shared experiences of war and reconstruction in the twentieth century, and the activities of the European Union in recent times, as well as the first international organisations for urban development and planning. At the same time, however, he points to the persistence of national planning traditions and approaches. To this day, diversity rather than uniformity seems to be typical of Europe. This diversity is reflected not least in different terminologies. In his contribution, Harald Bodenschatz examines the German concept of *Städtebau*, which can have both practical and theoretical connotations and encompasses «urban products, production and relationships of production» (p. 208). Bodenschatz emphasises the social dimension of urban development – urban development is never self-sufficient and therefore cannot be explained by itself.

In her contribution, Carola Hein presents the technique of historical geospatial mapping to analyse urban planning processes in the port cities of London, Rotterdam and Hamburg over the period from 1300 to 2019. According to her assessment, they are characterised by a «palimpsestic condition» (p. 225). Using a «Datawheel» developed at TU Delft, data can be collected, processed, analysed, visualised and shared. On the basis of the maps created in this way, valuable insights into the development of port cities in relation to their hinterland areas can be gained and presented in a non-textual form.

José Luis Oyón and Jere Kuzmanić use Peter Hall's 1988 classic *Cities of Tomorrow* to discuss anarchist features in urban planning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and in the post-war period, but argue for a nuanced approach and a broadening of the source base. Alternative actors and sources of urban planning – namely from the activist environmental movement of the 1970s and its zines from Britain, the Netherlands, France and Scandinavia – are also the subject of Andrea Gimeno's essay. Gaia Caramellino and Nicole De Togni, on the other hand, use Italian examples to focus on «ordinary» housing, which was subject to less strict planning guidelines and more complex factors than is often assumed. The authors argue for a more balanced view of urban development in Italy in the 1950s and 1960s.

Florian Urban looks at the supposed «end of the planned city» after 1989, when market forces and entrepreneurial thinking seemed to displace state planning authorities at all levels. He identifies the deregulation of the housing market, master plans for the revitalisation of city centres, new mobility models and new forms of urban economic development as key issues. Drawing on examples from many European countries, Urban ultimately characterises recent developments as ambiguous, however, because there are also important legacies of continued state influence, particularly in the West after 1989.

The volume concludes with eight theses by Max Welch Guerra, in which the editor-in-chief again argues for a pan-European perspective on planning processes – which could then form the basis for global comparisons. He also argues for a greater focus on the socio-political dimension of planning and the semantic and conceptual differences between countries. He problematises the land-grabbing processes inherent in all spatial planning, as well as its growth orientation, and highlights the communicative and didactic functions in the history of planning. Among the shortcomings of the volume, which Welch himself identifies, are the urban planning aspects of European colonialism, occupation regimes and gender categories.

In terms of content and methodology, the volume provides valuable food for thought for the history of European urban planning. It is not, however, a handbook, even though the broad title might lead one to believe so, but rather illuminates individual aspects in research contributions, some of which are highly specialised. However, each is interesting to read, carefully documented and encourages further in-depth study of the topics. A comprehensive index makes it possible to search for names, places and topics. The geographical distribution reflects the location of the editors and thus only partially fulfils the pan-European claim. A further point of criticism is that the contributions deal a great deal with urban planning, but less with specific urban planners – the attempt to avoid retelling the master narratives of great men, but to focus primarily on historical traditions and social and legal contexts, is to be welcomed

in principle, but left the reviewer occasionally missing individual persons. This volume does not yet provide the perfect bridge between urban studies, neighbouring disciplines such as historical geography and general contemporary history, but it does offer many valuable starting points for further work.