

(Re)-positioning Spatial Planning History and Historiography

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Teaching, Learning & Researching **Spatial Planning**

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Teaching, Learning & Researching Spatial Planning

TOOLS, CONCEPTS AND IDEAS TAUGHT AT THE SECTION OF SPATIAL PLANNING AND STRATEGY OF THE
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(Re)-positioning Spatial Planning History and Historiography

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Since its emergence in the 19th century, modern spatial planning has served as a tool to address public health issues, to organise infrastructure, or to structure cities and landscapes. Throughout this period, planning has been both praised and challenged by the different actors involved. Governments and corporations have historically used planning tools to advance the political, economic, or social interest of select groups. In some cases, public and private planning authorities have implemented planning for the greater good of the local population. The history of planning contains many examples for better cities, for example, with green spaces for the whole population, public spaces and transportation or healthy neighbourhoods that benefit the society at large. In other cases, planning has created segregated spaces. Colonial planning of infrastructures for the extraction of raw materials or the generation of energy, the segregation of local and foreign populations, of rich and poor, the settlement of low-income populations in the vicinity of polluting industries are just some of the examples where planning has created and supported spatial injustice, often across the globe. Students of spatial planning need to be aware of the background of current planning systems and planned spaces and their global interrelationships to assess the impact of these histories on current and future planning practice. They need to understand the role that planning historiography plays in the promotion of select planning approaches over time and space as a foundation for responding to contemporary societal challenges, informing long-term spatial planning on multiple scales.

SPATIAL PLANNING, HISTORY, HISTORIOGRAPHY, EDUCATION, SOCIETAL CHALLENGES

1. Introduction

In the late nineteenth century, one form of planning emerged as a discipline in England, continental Europe, and the United States. It was conceived as a rational, modernist pursuit for societal improvement in response to the urban ills – overcrowding, pollution, unhealthy living environment – produced by the Industrial Revolution. Planning practitioners tried to respond to rapidly transforming cities, to new forms of production and consumption, to uncontrolled population growth, and to new types of transportation and communication. In short, planning targeted hygiene, housing, and transportation. As industrialisation and colonial empires spread, various planning approaches – land readjustment, building lines, zoning – followed often colonial geographies of power.

Planning has been called upon since the mid-nineteenth century to propose interventions that would steer future development based on calculations, assumptions, and formal criteria from the past. Planners have taken up this complex challenge, often with the best of intentions. They have worked with national governments and local elites, occasionally involving civic society. They have responded to the needs of expanding cities and of transforming nations. They have provided new infrastructure and identified functional zones. They have projected urban futures in times of war and disaster as well as peace. They have worked to integrate existing (planned) spaces and established (planning) cultures into their interventions. At a time when informal urbanism is becoming more prominent notably in recently industrialising and urbanising countries of the Global South, planning

history provides an opportunity to understand the motivations for future interventions.

Planning history is an interdisciplinary field with contributions from multiple disciplines. Urban historians, economic historians, social historians, architectural historians, and historians of landscape and the environment, have all tackled questions of plans and planning including housing, construction, local government, social policy, utopianism, urban form, and so forth. Some authors define planning history as describing the formal, aesthetic appearance of the built environment, taking an architectural or urban design approach. For others, planning history comes out of the social sciences, and for yet other scholars it is the focus of urban geography or situated in political, social, and economic histories.

Planning history as a field has existed since the 1970s, and several institutions and journals focus on it, including well-known ones such as wide-ranging English-language books like Peter Hall's seminal *Cities of Tomorrow* (Hall, 2014 [1988]). While being one of the first books to explore the history of planning, and its theory and practice, Hall's work did not reflect on the field of planning history itself. Several collections include original texts of nineteenth- and twentieth-century planning (Birch, 2008; LeGates & Stout, 2003; Larice & Macdonald, 2012; Wegener, 2007). Broader questions of global planning cultures, as tackled in other works, also include reflections on historical trajectories and their relations to specific national and local traditions (Sanyal, 2005).

A wider range of narratives is important to the re-writing, re-thinking, re-orienting of planning history itself. If Sub-Saharan African planning, for

instance, has largely been left out of the canon of planning history, a more expansive understanding of these histories can prove transformative (Silva, 2015). Such a rethinking also involves acknowledging the places and languages from which planning history is written and questioning the underlying premises. It acknowledges the extensive historiography of planning, and that much of the important writing on planning history came out of England and the United States first. It also emphasises that, in the end, these are regional or national stories that need to be paralleled with other approaches guided by different language patterns and by different political, economic, social, and cultural approaches to planning. Reflecting on the multiple planning histories and historiographies of Southeast Asia and South Asia, for example, requires that authors understand planning as an expression of state power and corporate development.

Recent research in planning history aims to overcome the limitations of different disciplines and geography (Hein, 2018). Some authors have started to address the challenges of planning history writing, including the need to overcome national stories that are bounded by specific archives, languages, and cultures, towards transnational understanding, to go beyond empirical and narrative-driven research to develop critical theories and broader contextualised perspectives (Ward, Freestone, & Silver, 2011; Nasr & Volait 2003; Hein, 2014; 2018). While such an approach cannot be comprehensive, we need global planning histories, giving insights into different approaches, geographical patterns, languages, and principles, connecting the parallel worlds of academic planning history in different disciplines and facilitating the emergence of collective languages, terminologies, methodologies, and

theories. This chapter aims to provide some insight into the 'Why', 'How', and 'What' of planning history, to conclude with its role for research and education in the field of planning.

2. Why planning history?

The discipline and focus of planning have shifted in tune with political and economic developments as well as societal changes across the decades. Today, planning is primarily a forward-looking discipline, in which past developments and approaches play a limited but changing role. Over time, some architects and planners have looked to the past as a toolbox, using historical references, for example, by copying historic squares, while others cite prior plans only in passing, or ignore them altogether. This change is also reflected in planning education. A brief look at curricula and their changes over time indicates that planning schools increasingly prefer to teach planning theory rather than planning history, and most planning schools do not train planning historians. But discerning what planning is, and what the city is in time and place, planning history builds awareness of diverse ideological and theoretical positions. It also allows for new transnational, conceptual, methodological, or theoretical approaches to emerge, for instance about informality, that challenge the ideas of modernity in urban form and function, and that call into question the concepts of planning and representations of space.

Planning history helps us to understand planning's past influence on our cities, regions, and nations, and to imagine the future of planning as a professional practice as the past or even current performance of the discipline is being questioned and global challenges require comprehensive new

measures. As a means to better understand the role of planning in the historical transformation of cities and regions, planning history can also help us understand the downsides or shortcomings of historic planning practice and the needs for novel approaches. For example, in some areas of the world, planning has created more economic, social, or ethnic inequalities rather than solving them, think of infrastructure planning for the extraction of minerals, petroleum, or agricultural products and their transportation to industrialised countries – the extraction of petroleum from Iran and other countries of the Middle East and its export to Europe and the United States stands as an example, and a close analysis can help understand the reasons for these shortcomings. In other areas, attempts to undo former colonial planning practice can benefit from a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of colonial planning practice, ranging from legal practices to aesthetic and symbolic interactions. For example, the highly publicised destruction of colonial Japanese heritage buildings in Korea, such as the Government General Building, did not go hand in hand with an undoing of colonial laws. Furthermore, the emergence of informal settlements that in some areas of the world are more extensive than planned ones raises questions about the necessary flexibility of planning and the changing intersection between planned spaces and informal urban development. Many planning interventions have simply failed, or have been too inflexible to accommodate urban change.

Planning has shaped our environment extensively but it has also faced extensive criticism. Zoning, originally developed to improve health in a time of industrial development in the nineteenth century, destroyed multifunctional neighbourhoods, and

became a target for citizen movements such as the *Atelier de Recherche et d'Action Urbaines* (ARAU) since the 1960s (ARAU, 1984). Over the last decade, cities and regions around the world have been facing increased challenges ranging from climate change and global sea level rise to migration and population growth, and comprehensive solutions are needed to create resilient planning systems. Planning history can be an important and valuable tool for conceptualising such systems for the future, speaking to the challenges of the future and integrating lessons from the past.

The American planning historian, Larry Vale, introduced the concept of critical resilience, arguing that such discussions need to be more attuned to issues of power and politics in moments of disaster and post-trauma (Vale & Lamb, 2016). Pointing out that planning historians are well trained in analysing historical disaster recovery, Vale believes that this analytical tool should be applied more widely when thinking about contemporary and future resilience. We do not need ideological answers or engineers who engage only with future challenges – we need planners with a sense of history and historians with a sense of planning.

Planning historians also have an important role in analysing past plans for a bygone future, pointing out challenges for the future. As they evaluate and sometimes revive future visions, they provide grounding for contemporary design. The planning of Berlin as a capital is just one example of the impact that visionary plans have had on planning discussions worldwide. Numerous visionary projects for Berlin that did not become reality – from monumental plans under Albert Speer, Adolf Hitler's favourite architect, to megastructural projects for the Capital Berlin competition 1957/58 – have informed



Figure 1: Albert Speer Plan for Berlin. The Volkshalle's Great Dome can be seen at the top of this model of Speer's plan. Author of the photo unknown. Image available at the Bundesarchiv, Bild 146III-373 / Retrieved from: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=5484311> CC-BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 2: A small part of the huge underground shopping mall underneath Tokyo Station. Photo by author.

projects in later decades. These can have as much or longer standing powers than realised plans; they can travel through time and space, influencing later decision-making or flourishing where they find fertile ground. Speer's projects, while not realised, would shape planning decisions in West Berlin from the end of the war until after the fall of the Wall in 1989, with subsequent planners avoiding all monumental or axial designs. Other concepts live on, and many have since been realised in piecemeal fashion at the hands of public institutions and corporations: megastructural visions established in Europe and Japan can be seen as predecessors of extensive underground shopping malls, huge skyscrapers connected by pedestrian bridges, and large infrastructure such as floating airports.

3. How to write and teach planning history?

The notion of planning is intimately related to the concept of modernity and modernisation after the Industrial Revolution, and to the assumption that changing the physical spaces of a city would change its residents' life conditions, and social and cultural patterns (Scott, 1998). Planning historians have contributed to writing the history of modernity, documenting the efforts of leading planners, strains of practice, and interventions. Rethinking the definition of modern as being related to industrialisation, Scott's book both defines the concept of planning and revises that definition, going beyond the concept of planning as 'progress' and the activity of the historical 'avant-garde' and exploring planned interventions in conjunction with vernacular or unplanned spaces.

Questioning the concept of the modern in planning brings new themes and questions to the forefront of research. Planning has presented itself as a science, employing social engineering, traffic engineering, and other supposedly objective methodologies. However, few planners or historians have questioned or tested the results of specific interventions. Perhaps even worse, what was presented as a scientific response to health in one era later itself became seen as a health hazard. For example, blocks and slabs in greenery-type housing projects of the 1920s and 50s are now condemned for reasons of security and aesthetics, elements that are important to walkability, a topic that scholars today have recognised as essential to combat obesity and foster a sense of community.

As a result of the prominence of a Western approach in history writing, there are lines of influences that are taken for granted rather than being critically explored and reflected. Mesopotamia and Greece and the Roman empire were interconnected, but they often appear as disconnected in contemporary writing, as the two areas today belong to two different cultural areas; similarly, Japan has long been considered a recipient of planning rather than a translator and generator of concepts for Asia, mostly because Asian languages and approaches to planning history do not easily intersect with those in English or other European languages. A global view of planning history critically challenges some traditions and raises questions of periodisation, overcoming established narratives.

Historiography is never objective, but we have to be very careful to make sure that it does not become only subjective. To do that, historians (including those of planning) provide evidence that is significant and appropriate. The 'history of practice'

as examined by historians focuses on how people acted in the past, but typically does not consider the past's implications for the present. In contrast, practitioners 'practice history', that is, they turn to history for their work in the present, but they do not always consider the past on its own merits. This is also true for analysis of how planning practices cross borders: often books on 'learning from' other cultures are about creating an argument for certain planning approaches rather than gaining deeper understanding (Shelton, 1998). Treating planning history explicitly as the history of a future-oriented discipline, allows scholars and practitioners to explore how the discipline has narrated the past and how planning practitioners have mobilised the past for the future.

Questions of planning's authorship, spatiality, and temporality are reproduced in planning history as it has traced the development of planning and its targets, focusing on issues of hygiene, infrastructure, and housing, and on capital design, infrastructure planning, and heritage (the use of the past itself). But planning histories have not addressed all areas, time periods, or practices in the same ways. The writing of history at times went hand in hand with the making of history. Some of the early planning histories have been written to legitimise a group of planners or a specific ideology, notably of the modernist movement, the CIAM movement, or megastructures (Kultermann, 1986). Even attempts to counter the focus on modernist architecture and planning have started with the focus on single architects, including Albert Speer (Larsson, 1983). Occasionally (architectural or urban) historians were even part of iconic movements: Kenneth Frampton famously documented the modern movement and Noboru Kawazoe wrote for and with the Japanese

Metabolists. These engagements raise the question of how historians more generally have created an official narrative of the modern city and its planning while being affiliated or intellectually connected with certain movements.

When planning historians narrate the past, they risk creating heroic histories. The actors of planning and thus the heroes of planning history were often elite white males who followed their 'interest' or 'genius'. Emphasising these stories – not necessarily historians' conscious goals but rather the result of a specific cultural moment – ensured that other plans and planners would be ignored and that a celebratory track record emerged. The resulting planning history can be read as a listing of their achievements without acknowledging the specific political, social, economic, cultural context. Studies abound of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, Ildefonso Cerdà, Ebenezer Howard, Le Corbusier, Robert Moses, and the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), and their respective plans. Even when these accounts are critical, these are often still the types of projects and images that figure prominently, influence opinion, and may even become cliché.

Heroic stories also risk perpetuating gendered structures. But women have always been present in planning. While fewer women were active as planners in the early years, upper-class women tried to help the poor, such as the German writer and social activist Bettina von Arnim who worked with the architect Wilhelm Stier to project for a city of the poor, establishing a well-recognised line of intervention in planning by women. By the 1920s and 1930s, women started to become professional planners: Catherine Bauer and her sister Elisabeth Bauer Mock, and Jaqueline Tyrwhitt are just some

examples. Planning history also has its female leaders, from Francoise Choay to Annie Fourcaut, Susan Fainstein, Leonie Sandercock, Donatella Calabi, and Helen Meller, who have contributed innovative approaches. A full account of planning history from a female lens is increasingly important but currently still missing.

Other patterns of planning that have yet to be fully acknowledged in planning history include the history of engineering. The history of engineering has been closely connected to that of planning, but historians have yet to recognise engineers' contributions to planning. Studying the ways in which planners have picked up new technologies in attempts to promote organised, planned spaces over unplanned ones may reveal new connections in the long-term narrative of planning. Planners have not been initiators but have picked up on engineering responses as drivers and executors. Visionaries like Le Corbusier promoted engineering, and dressed it up. Elevators, trains, cars, and planes, all these different means of transportation have provided the incentive for extensive changes of urban form and function. Trains and cars provided the opportunity and tools for suburbia, while planes allowed for the creation of networks of cities more closely connected to each other than each city was connected to its surrounding urban area. Engineers made it their goal to counter the forces of nature while planners and architects provided the designs and rationales that sustained the transformation. New materials made possible buildings and entire cities that could be defended against water, earthquake, or climate, in river deltas once flooded on a regular basis, on coastlines or next to rivers, in areas that were prone to earthquakes or tsunamis, ones located in punishingly hot or cold climates. But the engineer's

preferred focus remains narrow, whereas planning implies some degree of comprehensiveness, a social or environmental function. Understanding the pitfalls of engineering-based planning merits further investigation to also learn from failures and missed chances.

Moreover, critical planning histories and awareness of missing narratives can provide a foundation for planning that addresses the challenges of the future. For example, historical analysis of the physical and financial flows of petroleum can help us understand the formation of modern cities, making visible that industry's need of industrial, administrative, retail, and ancillary spaces as well as its representation of the built environment in advertisement, art, architecture, or urban form. Such a study can also help us anticipate and design for changes in an imminent post-oil future: remediating and repurposing defunct refineries and storage tanks, rethinking infrastructural and other linkages between oil industries and headquarters, reorganising global towards more circular economies. Understanding how and these systems and dynamics developed historically will help planners imagine new futures for them.

4. Imagining the future(s) of planning history?

In order to imagine the future of planning history, we need to develop new concepts and challenge the teaching of planning and its history in diverse educational systems, in planning schools, and in other academic departments. That might also mean integrating and teaching design thinking, not only in the context of planning education, but also in social

science departments, and developing relevant curricula that engage with new perspectives.

Acknowledging biases in terms of culture, colonialism, gender, and fields of inquiry is a necessary foundation for planning historians. For example, they will have to reflect on the writing of planning histories involving countries that have fought wars against each other. Questions of gender will be central, especially when they engage with planning in societies where men dominate the public realm, considering not only questions of exclusion and the role of women but constructions of masculinity itself. They will have to reflect on the role of Western theory in the analysis of megacities in countries like China, for instance, as it ignores the specificity of these cities and theories related to the cultures in which they emerged. Other boundary-pushing work for planning historians will concern the 'urbanisation' of oceans – the proliferation of drilling platforms, energy parks, and other floating structures – and questions of energy networks, food landscapes, and the study of commodity flows and their influence on the built environment.

Planning history scholars have recently made new steps towards overcoming biases such as the focus on English-language sources, and developing novel interdisciplinary, trans-cultural, and post-colonial approaches (Hein, 2018). The Planning History Handbook, for example, examines sites, dynamics, and typologies, and explores the state of the field, its achievements and shortcomings, and future challenges. Such novel approaches can serve as a foundation for defining the field and as a springboard for scholars, practitioners, and students engaging in innovative research. Writing and teaching planning history can build on this to provide both new global standpoints and new approaches, querying official

iconographies, including other disciplines, investigating different parts of the world.

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