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Allen LeBaron

SOME HISTORY

In many ways town and country planning is an exceedingly old science or art. Nineve, Babylon, and Damascus were (or are) planned cities and as long ago as 3,000 B.C. worker's villages in areas near the sites of the great pyramids were carefully laid out. Miletus was an example of town planning by the ancient Greeks and of course the Romans were notable and conspicuous planners.

The early reasons for town planning were mainly to provide proper drainage and water supplies. And to this end streets were laid out systematically and building sites were controlled. Sometimes building heights were also specified in ancient cities. But such ends have never been the only reasons for planning. In the middle ages, for example, fortifying a town called for elaborate plans about walls, ramparts and gates. And, in fact, the effects of designing towns for defense can still be seen in some European cities, where roads that once radiated from the center have over the years turned into a maze of twisted streets. Still later, during the Renaissance there was considerable large scale planning which gave prime importance to what may be termed "visual effects." In such cases the ends of planning were to please the reigning monarchs and development was in terms of large vistas and open squares. The Palace of Versailles is a good example of the results of this monarchic emphasis.

These objects of ancient and medieval town planning must be placed against the background of urban population characteristics prevailing in earlier periods. Until fairly modern times the population of cities has never tended to be very large. City size
was always limited by local food resources. Obtaining food was so important that even many inhabitants of cities remained either cultivators or had ties to the land through ownership. One of the main reasons for establishing new towns was that the technical limit of food resources had been reached in older areas.

Even in the face of food and transport problems new cities arose because of the forces creating urban growth. Of these forces, probably the most important was the influx into urban areas of displaced agricultural population that in its rural "home" tended always to exceed the number that the land could employ. The threat of starvation pushed these people to the cities.

Besides migrants, another force for urban growth was the push of wealth into the cities. The returns to capital tended to be greater in the centers of trade and commerce. Wages were low because the people who had been driven to the cities as the "poor" always formed a vast army of unemployed. Rome, Paris and London were all founded in the first instance on capital that came from outside areas and on the exploitation of cheap labor. 1/

As time passed the large cities of the world found that their land resources could no longer support their growing populations. In order to obtain necessary food supplies, these centers turned more and more to manufacturing and trade. In countries like England, where the land base is limited, the whole nation was faced with the compulsion to industrialize.

INDUSTRIALIZATION

The industrial revolution had a profound effect on town planning for even in this field the doctrines of Adam Smith seemed to prevail. Town growth was thought to be best left alone since in following their own "self interest" they would automatically develop in the most satisfactory fashion. It may be argued that the lack of town planning in the 19th century was a manifestation of the doctrines of laissez faire. 2/ Whether or not one accepts this viewpoint is
of little consequence. What matters is that the growth of factory towns and the concentration of industry in large centers created social problems that had never been thought of before. Due largely to the attractions of industry, cities began to grow rapidly. There was now a "pull to the city," not only of labor but of ever more industry and trade.

The rapid industrial growth of many European cities throughout the 19th century was accompanied by a general shortage of labor. And although this shortage had a tendency to raise the wages of labor above the subsistence levels of former times, the actual demands on labor in terms of human effort (during the whole of what was essentially a period of accumulation), was enormous. In some cases the development of factory towns was based on what amounted to conscription. In these towns workers had to be jammed in together. In the absence of public transport everyone necessarily had to be within walking distance of jobs. Thus, in certain instances, the ill health and unhappy lot of the factory classed in the 19th century can be traced to the towns and cities people were forced to live in.

In extreme situations there was no provision for open spaces or for recreation. There was no cheap, public transport which would allow "day at the seashore." The whole situation used to be succinctly expressed in an old saying to the effect that "the cheapest way out of Manchester is the gin mill."

Naturally, not all cities in the industrial or semi-industrial nations were left to pursue uncontrolled courses of growth. Paris, for example, was a notable exception. There, Baron Haussmann, acting as Prefect of the Seine, was allowed virtually a free hand in rebuilding Paris into the city we know today. He created a number of effects that we still associate with town planning. But although he achieved a great deal — vistas, grand plazas and boulevards — the whole scheme seemed to revert to an older monarchist attitude. Undoubtedly this attitude reflected the wishes of the
leaders of the Second Empire, but it saw an attitude that would scarcely have been sustainable in an aura of political democracy. In retrospect, one is amazed at the singular lack of relevance Haussmann's monarchic approach had to the groupings within modern society, the main lines of which must have been clear even by the middle of the 19th century. These groupings sprang, at least in part, from the serious effects of unlimited town growth during the first century of the industrial revolution. It is difficult to see how the rebuilding of Paris (in the form it took under Haussmann's direction) could have had any direct effect of raising the standard of living of the great bulk of the citizens of the city.

It should be clear that the principle of laissez faire as applied to town planning in the 19th century achieved something much less than the optimum adjustment between social groups and classes. And while this result in and of itself is enough to invalidate the principle, we may take note of yet another failure. Uncontrolled town growth did not in fact "automatically" achieve even a full measure of economic efficiency. That this is so can be shown simply by reference to the un-economic effect on a nation or a region where large areas are allowed to build up dependent upon success of one industry for survival. There are numerous examples in Europe and in the United States where hard times in only one industry can cause widespread unemployment in a given region. Another example is where the siting of some industry causes blight and a consequent destruction in property values.

Probably the most striking result of the laissez faire approach to planning in the 19th century was that it produced some really big cities. New York, London, Paris and Berlin were all much larger than anything comparable in ancient or medieval times. At the same time the rapidity of city and population growth in the 19th century was the main thing that caused the present planning problems in large areas.
PROBLEMS OF LARGE CITIES

In contrast to the numbers of poverty stricken that have inhabited the cities of the earth, the wealthy have always been able to pick and choose where they desire to live. Throughout all history, those having an option have usually elected to live on the outskirts of cities. In such locations they enjoy the cultural advantages of the center along with the amenities of the countryside. As cities grew, the people of wealth moved outwards in concentric rings in order to maintain their positions on the periphery. Workers pushed from the center found shelter in tenements that had been the homes of the rich. More workers from rural areas constantly provided a larger market, which in turn induced new factories to locate in the center area. Some people were displaced, new labor was needed in the new factories, and so the circle went around and the cities grew.

Since most business employment is at the center, there has always been a constant encroachment on central housing. From an economic standpoint the central land is worth more in commercial use than it is in providing shelter. But the result is usually more overcrowding in other areas of the city and a steady deterioration of the residential areas next to the industrial sites, or even next to downtown office buildings. After so long, the result is row on row of dismal tenements such as were common sights in the large cities of the world by the end of the 19th century. Fortunately, for some people, the development of tramlines and the automobile allowed them to escape to the suburbs to live.

But, until fairly recent times the amount of employment in the center usually grew at a faster pace than people moved out, and the tenements are still with us. An extreme example of this situation was in London just prior to the first World War. At that time the London County Council governed an area of 75,000 acres and in this space lived a population in excess of 5,000,000 people. The density was appalling. Nevertheless the city continued to grow during the
period between the two wars (see table). In fact, the pull of a large market like London is illustrated by the three year period, 1932-1934, wherein 490 new factories were built in the immediate area of London and only 2 were built in the rest of England.

Comparison of growth in population and employment between London/ Home counties and the rest of England - interwar period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percent of Growth from 1921-1937</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Population</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All England</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London/Home Counties</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obviously extremely large cities such as New York or London may have to take special steps in planning that smaller cities may ignore. For example, it may be found that little planning progress can be made until the city is stopped from growing. In the case of London, this very decision was made long ago. However, success in holding London at a constant size has only recently been achieved, following 16 or 17 years of effort. It should be noted that this 'success' has mainly come about through strong central government action.

In other cases, where cities only desire to control location and not limit industrial growth, a considerable amount of attention has been given to attacking poor living conditions in tenement areas. Despite what has been accomplished along these lines it is safe to say that the betterment of housing remains the biggest planning problem for most cities.

The next biggest difficulty is probably that of human and vehicular congestion. Sometimes a solution to the problem of congestion seems to be the paramount issue, but this emphasis is largely due to the political expression that some of the ancillary
questions relating to congestion receive. Admittedly, wasted commuting
time, high travel costs, inadequate rapid transport and that Baal of
congestion, the private automobile, are all important problems. If,
however, public funds are limited, the question of giving priority to
better housing would have to be investigated before attacking congestion
problems.

AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT

Especially since the first World War, the movement to the suburbs
has created phenomena that indicates there is as great a need for
country planning as there is for town planning. Among these phenomena
may be mentioned ribbon development, urban sprawl, and dormatory towns.
It goes without saying that from a planning point of view, some of
these phenomena are highly undesirable. With ribbon development local
traffic clutters and chokes the arterial traffic, the people at the
ends of the development demand all municipal services, and the best
planning practices go to waste if travellers always feel that they
are simply going through "one long town." Some of these same objections
apply to urban sprawl, where subdivisions merge into each other and
finally merge right into adjacent towns with never a welcome break of
green or a hint of fresh air. From the standpoint of living conditions,
there may be much to be said in favor of dormatory areas and semi-rural
housing estates (but they don't solve congestion problems), yet the
suburb may turn out to be a poor compromise. "Many of our suburbs,
villages of speculative housing called by whatever fancy name, are but
the slums of tomorrow, connected by roads and vast parking lots and
flanked by giant billboards." Only in very recent years has any
real attempt at creating "new towns" been made in America; it is too
early to judge results.

A clear trend towards second homes has developed and since these
tend to be sought in nonurban areas, the long run environmental effects
may be quite unsatisfactory, regardless of short run individual gains.

With respect to congestion, not only trends but some general
solutions are now clear. In the United States particularly, the over-specialization in favor of the private automobile is reaching fantastic proportions. New highways and freeways aren't the only answer; they often create more problems than they solve. At best, freeways in urban areas barely hold their own with the increasing number of automobiles. Time has proven that there is only one major corrective. And that is to redevelop two despised (at least in the U.S.) modes of transportation; public conveyances and private feet, both of which are essential for movement.

During the course of the 20th century the distinction between rural and urban living has nearly been completely broken down. The city worker presses ever outward in his search for green, quiet, and fresh air place to raise a family. More recently it has been realized that because of the undesirable phenomena attendant with working in commercial centers and living outside, the urban migrants are destroying the very conditions they are seeking to attain.

GOALS OF LAND USE PLANNING

We now stand in the curious position of observing that the 19th century proved that industry left to its own devices was capable of producing terrible towns and the 20th century has proved that man can destroy the rural areas as well. This situation has produced no revolt of the mass of the people -- not even the commuters! The main popular demand (especially in Europe) has been for more and better housing as the standard of living has gone up. One of the reasons for lack of awareness or lack of expression on the part of the masses has been because the idea of town and country planning has not been pushed politically as much as it might have been. It demands to be an obvious fact that politicians have generally avoided the whole planning situation and its implications either through ignorance or lack of foresight.

Although the modern land use planning movement has lacked the political weight that might have given it more expression, the
pioneers in this field have at least established some solid goals to work towards. In trying to bring the work place and the home into some kind of organic harmony, they are applying sociological methods to social problems. This is the main feature that differentiates modern planning from earlier versions. Motives in former epochs were usually military, esthetic or monarchic. Now the question is the social welfare of the common man.

Clearly, this means that there is a need for all of man's learning and wisdom to solve the planning problems of town and country. Sociologists, architects, geographers, economists, agriculturists, and technicians must all be prepared to give answers to the questions of land use planning:

1. The control of industrial site activities -- is this the key to today's planning?
2. Shall we develop new towns complete with industry and re-settle congested elements of urban population?
3. What shall be done about the reckless destruction of agricultural land? What about the speculative builder?
4. What more can be done on state and national parks?
5. How shall we go about curing dis-amenities?
6. Can we prevent wasteful use of land in urban sprawl? Shall urban renewal be undertaken first? -- last? -- never?
7. Would it pay to actually reconstruct badly planned towns?

These are only a few of the questions of land use planning and they don't reveal the full implications of what is embodied in the whole idea. Of course planning is really in its infancy; each stumbling step makes everyone aware of the need for a scientific basis. It is difficult for "planners" to really say what must be accomplished. But one step must be taken and that is to create a higher regard for planning. Planning can no longer be regarded as a luxury or a trimming that can be dispensed with. There must be an awareness of planning as being fundamental to harmonizing
solutions to populations, pollution, housing and food problems in a manner which will make a better life a reality for the majority and that only by planning is it possible to make the best use of our scarce resources.
FOOTNOTES

1/ Sir Fredrick J. Osborn, personal conversation, November, 1957.


3/ Growth was controlled in the sense that it was dictated primarily by the commercial motives of the day.

4/ Not everyone agrees that there will be long-run success in holding the size constant.


6/ Ibid.
