
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The 20th century was the most brutal and destructive hundred-year period in human history. More people were killed in its wars, large and small, than in any other century. At times, the will to destruction was so immensely overpowering that the very future of human life seemed to be threatened. Yet, at the same time, it was also the most civilising and creative of centuries. Many of the very technological advances that facilitated destruction also fed world economic growth on a scale never before seen. Huge improvements in agricultural efficiency and medical knowledge meanwhile allowed an unprecedented increase in world population, from perhaps 1.6 billion in 1900 to about 6.1 billion in 2000. By then over 3 billion people lived in cities, compared to perhaps 250 million in 1900. Cities everywhere have been the engines and the symbols of economic growth, intensifying production, distribution and consumption. Too often, however, large parts of them were, and remain, deeply unsatisfactory settings for human life.

Generally speaking, though, the richest nations of the world have also been those with the biggest proportions of their populations living in urban areas. It is not surprising therefore that, during the 20th century, the affluent nations devoted so much attention to ameliorating and, indeed, trying to perfect the city. The underlying aim was to reconcile its economic dynamism with its other roles as a social, cultural and political entity. By 1914, these efforts were sufficiently developed in most advanced capitalist countries to warrant being given a specific name, such as *Städtebau*, town planning, *urbanisme*, city planning, *stedebouw*, *toshi keikatu* or *urbanismo*. Despite this proliferation of nomenclature, however, each nation did not autonomously evolve the ideas which lay behind the various labels. Almost from the outset there was a vigorous cross-national interchange of ideas and practice. No single international label ever emerged but we use the generic term 'urban planning' when signifying this growing international body of thought and practice. Of course, the notion of consciously shaping the physical form and disposition of the urban environment was not itself without historical precedent. What was new to the late 19th and, more especially, the 20th centuries, was the idea of making urban planning an integral part of capitalist urban development within broadly liberal and democratic societies.

The story of how this happened forms the central concern of this book. It is, in other words, a wide and long survey of the development of urban planning in the advanced capitalist world during the 20th century. Its main concern is to explain how, where and why urban planning thought and practice developed and spread throughout western Europe, North America, Australia and Japan.

NARRATIVES, GRAND AND OTHERWISE

The ambition of this aim is self-evident. An earlier generation of urban-planning historians and commentators, such as Mumford (1961), Korn (1953) and Benevolo

(1980), were not afraid of such grand sweeps of historical writing. Yet despite (or perhaps, in part, because of) the recent expansion of scholarship in planning history, few other individual scholars have initiated comparable international syntheses or overviews in recent years. Conspicuous and important exceptions have been Anthony Sutcliffe (1981), Thomas Hall (1986; 1997), Tony King (1990), Gerd Albers (1997) and Donatello Calabi (2000). Much the boldest, and deservedly the best known, of this recent crop of 'grand narrators' is Peter Hall (1988; 1998), whose outstanding research and writing skills (and sheer energy) put him in a class by himself. Even he, though, like all the others, is obliged to insert limitations of period, subject focus and geographical area. There are limits as to what any individual, however remarkable, can encompass. It seems only to be collective works, most relevantly here Arnold Whittick's *Encyclopaedia of Urban Planning* (1980), that are able to come close to transcending such constraints.

LIMITS OF THE BOOK

The present work certainly cannot avoid such narrowing. Considerations of coherence, length and manageability require that some bounds be set. Limitations of personal knowledge, understanding and linguistic range impose further constraints of a more arbitrary nature. The result is that the following pages focus on the countries of the advanced capitalist world. With occasional exceptions, the story is principally that of the large and, in planning terms, more innovative countries of northern and western Europe, together with the United States, Japan, Canada and Australia. It was in these countries, certainly, that what have been the world's most pervasive forms of 20th-century urban planning were developed and most fully elaborated.

Yet the gaps are large, and important. Absent, apart from faint echoes in the last two countries named and occasional passing comment, are the colonial and developing worlds. Also absent are the Communist or former Communist worlds. Even in western Europe, certain gaps are apparent. Spread across the periodised chapter structure, the reader will find the 20th-century planning histories of Germany, France and Britain recounted in some detail, along with that of the United States. Those of the Netherlands, the Nordic countries and Spain are also told continuously, but in lesser detail, as are those of Japan, Canada and Australia. Italy, Belgium and Austria appear rather more intermittently, reflecting their shorter periods in the international 'limelight'. Other countries feature only fleetingly, despite the fact that some, for example Switzerland, hold more interest than this brevity of treatment would suggest.

THE TROUBLE WITH GRAND NARRATIVES

Even with omissions, however, the geographical spread is wide and the chronological coverage ambitious. The mere act of putting many different national (and local) experiences together between book covers does not itself give coherence. For the sanity of the author and convenience of the reader, there have to be some unifying elements that give a cohesive structure or, more simply, a plot line to the narrative. In some respects, the stronger this plot line, or the grander the narrative which is

attempted, the better. It is always tempting in such circumstances to smooth out the bumps, moulding the presentation of detail to tell a clear and vivid story that will, perhaps, appeal to some half-formed sentiment in the minds of readers. Vividness and clarity have a price, however, because in varying degrees they deny the detail and variety of specific national and local experiences, the messy reality of how things actually happened. Not infrequently they also betray a desire to construct the story in simple moral terms, with heroes to be cheered and villains to be hissed. In writing about urban planning, we need look no further than Lewis Mumford (1961) and Peter Hall (1988) to find the garden city's inventor Ebenezer Howard and the arch-modernist Le Corbusier cast in these respective roles. (With admirable fairness, Jane Jacobs (1964) sees both of them, and indeed virtually all other planners, as villains.)

The more perceptive grand narrators are usually well aware of what they are doing, seeing the definition of a larger truth as more important than the many lesser ones that are thereby pushed into the background. Perhaps they are right. Yet, to their less informed readers and followers, there is too much of a subsequent temptation not to let the 'facts' stand in the way of a good story. The narrative, in other words, becomes mistaken for reality rather than simply being one interpretation of it. The starting point for this book is, therefore, a desire to pursue a slightly different course. Its plot line lies closer to the lesser truths and is less reverential towards what have come to be seen as the bigger ones. It derives from the author's value stance as an empirical historian of planning who is profoundly sceptical of generalisations and who values the smaller truths. It also reflects an extended immersion in the work of the many scholars throughout the world whose labours have uncovered many of these smaller truths of the history of urban planning.

THE MAIN THEMES

But if there is to be no conscious grand narrative, what prevents the story being a mere accumulation of facts? The first part of the answer lies in two related themes which are pursued throughout. These are *innovation*, meaning the creation and adoption of new ideas and practices; and *diffusion*, their spread across international boundaries. It follows that the story is skewed towards those innovations which have had an international resonance. There is also a dynamic quality, emphasising cross-national learning and the points of contact between the urban planning repertoires of different countries. As such, the story omits much that is routine or very specific in national planning experience. Nor does it formally describe or compare the planning systems of different countries. The reader will certainly find ample material to feed such interests. But its main concerns are with the formation, development and international spread of western urban planning ideas and practice.

INNOVATION AND DIFFUSION

INNOVATION THEORY AND URBAN PLANNING

In what has become the classic theory of innovation, the first of the key themes, the economic historian Joseph Schumpeter defined it as having two key dimensions

(Schumpeter, 1939). The first, and most fundamental, is *invention*, meaning the discovery of new ideas with far-reaching potential. This is only loosely linked to business activity. The second is *innovation* proper, whereby new ideas are adapted, packaged and applied in practical ways. Schumpeter was, of course, interested in innovation in relation to the development of business. He saw innovation proper as the key process, directly integrated into business development and triggered by a restless entrepreneurial pursuit of profit. An obvious question, therefore, is how far this thinking can be applied to urban planning, which is normally organised by the state, ostensibly in the public interest. Profit rates are not, in other words, the central concern (though they may be a constituent factor). Perceptions of the long-term functional requirements of business as a whole have taken precedence over short-term market fluctuations or the priorities of an individual firm. Moreover, other interests beyond business have also influenced innovation to varying degrees. Movements within civil society, sometimes directly informed or inspired by the original inventors, have usually steered or prodded the innovation process.

THE NATURE OF INNOVATION IN URBAN PLANNING

Relatedly, though in a more practical sense, it is also difficult in the field of urban planning to draw a clear distinction between invention and innovation. (Apart from anything else, no urban planning inventions or innovations ever appear to have been patented.) Yet there have been some fundamental urban planning ideas which could be said to have been 'invented'. These are the creative leaps in advance of any practice, often taking the form of large conceptual visions of what might be. But the reality of innovation has more often been that fundamental ideas have grown empirically from experimental or reflective practice, rather than occurring in advance of practical expression. Innovation, in the sense of application, has usually preceded invention.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN INNOVATION IN BUSINESS AND PLANNING

None of this, however, prevents us drawing on Schumpeter and subsequent work on economic innovation (P Hall, 1998). There are, after all, many features which are common to innovation in business and urban planning. In both, the practical application involved in innovation proper obviously requires the commitment of resources, so both will be subject to a more searching assessment than is strictly necessary for pure invention. We will, in some cases, find the profit motive applied just as directly in urban planning as in business where profit-seeking developers were the implementing agents of planning innovations. And there have been many similarities in the evolution of invention/innovation. From amateur beginnings, there has been greater institutionalisation and professionalisation of the process. Lone inventors, making their fortunes/reputations by creating and applying great new discoveries, have given way to specialist teams, often buried anonymously in large organisations. (Schumpeter himself scarcely foresaw, or wanted to foresee, the bureaucratisation of innovation.)

To anticipate, we will also find many parallels with the business world in the marked tendency to temporal and spatial clustering of urban planning innovations. In classic Schumpeterian theory, it was these clusters that stimulated and provided the main content of major long-term cycles of economic development. Many economists have, however, questioned whether the relationship really could be so simple. And clearly the fit of this part of the theory to urban planning history is less than convincing. Waves of urban planning activity were obviously triggered by much more than clusters of ideas and practices, even though they certainly shaped the content of what was actually done. On balance though, and despite some obvious mismatches, the various insights of classic innovation theory provide a useful set of prompts to help provide a loose structure for this historical account.

DIFFUSION OF INNOVATIONS

Classic innovation theory conceives of diffusion as the inevitable corollary of successful innovation. But it sees diffusion as a dilution of the competitive advantage and profitability of the original innovator. It is therefore a spur to further innovation in order for entrepreneurs and capitalists to seek new ways of restoring profits. This line of thinking is obviously much less applicable to our area of concern. Certainly the development of urban planning has at times reflected insecurities about the competitive or strategic advantage of one city or nation compared to others. There has, in other words, been a good deal of learning from rivals. But the sense of rivalry never seems to have been an obstacle to the international flow of planning information, in part, perhaps, because commercial secrecy has only rarely been an issue. Even then, the essentially public nature of cities has meant that rivals can easily observe many of the physical aspects of planning innovations.

Nor has there ever been any real desire, at least amongst the advanced capitalist countries, to inhibit the spread of knowledge about planning innovations. Quite the opposite in fact, because innovative countries have normally been eager to broadcast their achievements to anyone interested, especially their greatest rivals. Some have certainly seen this as one way of demonstrating their international superiority. Yet, almost from the outset, modern urban planning has shown a strong internationalist spirit. This has been the case despite obvious problems produced by language differences and distance. Often the internationalism was reinforced by direct personal contacts between planners in different countries. The huge improvements in international communications during the 20th century have, of course, helped intensify these contacts. Even the major international ruptures represented by wars did not for very long restrict the flows of planning knowledge amongst the countries considered in this book.

OTHER INSIGHTS ON URBAN PLANNING DIFFUSION

Classic innovation diffusion theory thus offers only a few insights that can be applied to urban planning. What, then, can we glean from other sources? Diffusion has certainly featured in previous historical writing on planning, but rarely as a major theme.

Typically, studies have examined diffusion as an integral part of wider or deeper inquiries. Their concern has been to show how a particular city, country or group of countries encountered key planning ideas or practices from elsewhere or how their own planning inventions and innovations spread. In other cases, diffusion has featured in the story of a particular planning tradition, such as the garden city or modern movements. What these studies have shown is that diffusion has occurred quite rapidly, and by a variety of means. They have also shown that it cannot be seen as a simple process of spreading fixed notions of planning from their original heartland.

A major concern has been the extent to which ideas and practices are changed during their diffusion. In other words, diffusion has often been closely interrelated with innovation (and even invention) as ideas and practices are reformulated in different places. Against this, there are also examples where what is adopted in one country directly mimics a model in another. Often, though, a distinction must be made between the original aspiration and the realities of implementation. The intention may well be to create a direct copy of an externally admired original, yet its realisation involves a much wider range of conscious and unconscious influences. Climatic, economic, legal, political, social and cultural factors may all play a part. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that the final outcome will show as close a resemblance to an external model as the original planning vision may have intended. Much depends, though, on who controls the diffusion process, and how tight that control is. There is a huge difference between planners in one country choosing to borrow a planning idea or model from another, and one where the idea or model is externally imposed with little or no discretion exercised within the receiving country. Many studies of colonial planning, for example, show external control of the diffusion process. Even within colonial settings, however, there have been many variations in the degree and form of that control.

HOW AND WHY

THREE ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

All this begins to shift the emphasis from the broad themes for investigation to the main areas in which we will search for understanding as to how and why innovations happened and diffusions occurred. This focus forms the other major element which gives the book coherence. Again, however, and in keeping with the author's general approach, it is not a single rigid or overarching framework of explanation. That would simply be yet another grand narrative, albeit one graced by pretensions to scientific method. Instead, three broad alternative ways of attributing causation in innovation and diffusion, derived from previous work about 20th-century planning and its history, are sketched out. These conjectures about the driving forces will certainly not be tested in the explicit or formal fashion demanded by formal scientific inquiry. To do this on such a broad canvas would require a book several times longer than this one. Rather, these alternative hypotheses will inform the narrative. This means that they will act as an implicit guide as to what aspects of the many individual episodes of innovation and diffusion will be discussed, and what surrounding information is presented and probed. From time to time the reader will be reminded of their

importance but, in general, they will be applied with a light touch. These disclaimers duly made, we can identify the three principal areas in which historians and theorists of planning have looked to explain innovation, diffusion and other facets of their subject.

STRUCTURAL EXPLANATIONS

At one extreme are what may be termed the structural explanations, which seek to understand what has happened in planning in terms of larger forces. The exact nature of the larger forces cited have varied. One general line of argument, more popular amongst theorists than historians, has stressed the primacy of the economic cycle with its tendency to generate periodic crises of capitalism that have 'required' some form of collective state response at the urban level to facilitate the resumption of successful capital accumulation (eg Castells, 1977). Often these responses have involved interventions which have a social as well as a directly economic significance. The assumption has been, broadly, that cities need both to keep their workforces healthy and well disposed towards their employers and to be efficient places in which to undertake production and distribution.

This kind of all-purpose economic structural explanation has often been refined. A few planning historians have, for example, identified what amounts to a functional imperative for planners, of reconciling the best interests of the various forms of capital at the urban level (eg McDougall, 1979). The needs of industrialists will obviously not be exactly the same as those of landowners and developers. High rents and high profits for developers may mean higher wages and lower profits for industrialists. Another important refinement of structural explanations has been to consider the geopolitical dimension alongside the purely economic. Many authors have seen international rivalries and tensions as important triggers of urban planning innovations and diffusions. This kind of argument has been most highly developed in writing about imperialism and urban planning (eg King, 1980). The argument here is that the political and governmental realities of colonialism are the overarching reality from which all else derives.

We could go on to suggest further elaborations and refinements, but the essential point is made. It cannot merely be assumed that explanation in urban planning history is confined solely to the activity itself. The potential structuring roles of economic and geopolitical forces (and, indeed, other broad parameters) need to be carefully considered. Context may not explain everything, as most planning historians would readily acknowledge. But this certainly does not mean that it is irrelevant to the 'text' of urban planning history.

KEY INDIVIDUALS

At the opposite end of the spectrum, many planning historians have preferred to give explanatory primacy to key individuals. While, to varying degrees, this kind of explanation has recognised the importance of context, it is not credited with any precise role in determining what happens. Context, in this view, creates challenges

and provides opportunities, nothing more. The 'text' of the urban planning response is seen as being altogether more autonomous, not inevitable or preordained but shaped by many random or chance circumstances. These involve, to a very large extent, the actions of creative and committed individuals, which in turn reflect the formative influences, experiences and encounters of those individuals. The existence of prominent individuals as innovators or diffusion intermediaries in planning is not, of course, a matter of dispute. The central question, however, is whether they can be seen as autonomous actors, literally making a difference by their actions, or whether they are really bearers of structural 'messages'. The latter involves considering whether, had the specific individuals who made a difference not existed, others would have come forward to fulfil the same role. In other words, if x innovator or y diffuser had not existed, would it have been necessary to invent them?

Just as few would claim that context is everything, so few would assert the absolute explanatory primacy of individuals. Several prominent historians of urban planning, such as Peter Hall (1988) and Gordon Cherry (ed, 1981) have, though, at times portrayed them as the principal active agents of historical change, rising to the challenges and seizing the opportunities thrown up by larger forces and events. This alone means that the individuals who 'made' planning's history must be carefully examined and treated, so far as possible, as historical subjects. Again, though, the wider evolution of ideas and practice is also important. For example, were alternative inventors of key planning ideas waiting in the wings if x (whose name we remember) had died from tuberculosis before articulating the key concept? What would have happened if y had known German and therefore read z's book in the original rather than a defective translation?

REFORMIST AND TECHNICAL MILIEUS

Between these two extremes lies a distinctive midrange approach to explanation. It acknowledges both structural context and key individuals but cedes explanatory primacy to the milieu within which new ideas and practices were formed, debated, refined and publicised. In other words, the research focus is the reformist, technical and, to some extent, institutional networks within which new ideas are fashioned into relevant practices (eg Sutcliffe, 1981; Cherry, 1974). In relation to diffusion, these networks are also the settings into which imported ideas and practices are received and in which they are adapted. They may also be active agents in promoting international diffusion of ideas. The exact nature of these networks and the extent to which they focus on urban planning has varied. Some may be informal, loose or occasional networks, perhaps finding their expression in international gatherings such as conferences or exhibitions. Urban planning might only be one of many other concerns. Others may be much more formal and focused organisations. These would include reformist bodies, pressure groups, professional bodies formed around the new technical expertise of urban planning, or educational and research institutions. Sometimes, formal agencies of national or city government may also come to fill this role, though not usually as a matter of routine.

In explanatory terms, the focus on milieu offers a way of directly linking the structural and the individual. In such settings, the isolated musings of a lone visionary

might well receive their first tentative airings. Here their ideas can be rehearsed and made into something altogether more practical and relevant to the 'real world'. Idealism, in other words, acquires a practical edge so that it can be more effectively promoted to politicians, business interests and civil society. The quantitative and qualitative 'density' of such networks within a particular country can also be taken as an important indicator of the strength of its urban planning discourse and technical capacity. Generally, we will find that the western countries which were most innovative in their urban planning were also those with the strongest networks. Conversely, those which were slower to adopt urban planning ideas were much weaker in this respect. Obviously, though, this correlation does not itself imply a causal relationship, but it highlights the need to probe this dimension.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

CARVING UP THE CENTURY

The reader should now have a broad impression of the book's main areas of inquiry, the possible lines of explanation that will be pursued and, therefore, the kind of information that is needed. The templates in this chapter will give some shape to the narrative flow. But, as mentioned earlier, they will not be applied with so heavy a hand as to obscure the many peculiarities and paradoxes in the history of 20th-century planning. It only remains therefore to outline the structure of the book. This is broadly chronological, adopting what is, in some ways, an arbitrary periodisation. Undoubtedly a better chronological fit could be found if fewer countries were in the frame. But compromises have been necessary, particularly in the second half of the century, where the historian does not have the obvious international staging posts of major wars. Even these, though, are less clear-cut than they might seem. For a European focus, 1914 and 1939 are obvious watershed dates. For the United States, though, the equivalent dates are 1917 and 1941. The most arbitrary dates of all, however, are those at the very beginning and end of the century, significant for no other reason than the way we choose to measure time.

THE CHAPTER STRUCTURE

The problem of beginning in 1900 is confirmed in the next chapter, which outlines the important 19th-century prelude. Largely, this is a story of invention and the beginning of innovation, with the first signs of cross-national learning. Chapter 3 then shows how these early initiatives blossomed in the new century into self-conscious national urban planning movements, with a mounting international dimension. There were further inventions but increasingly the emphasis was now on developing practical applications, which began to spread rapidly. The two chapters following cover another very creative period, namely 1914 to 1939, when the visionary inventors finally gave way to the practical innovators. Despite the disruptive effects of the First World War, rapid diffusion meant that virtually every advanced capitalist country encountered planning ideas and practices during these years. The scale of planning

activity therefore requires us to handle this period in two chapters rather than one. These distinguish between the major formative planning traditions (in Germany, Britain, France and the United States) in Chapter 4 and the smaller countries and more derivative traditions in Chapter 5.

This geographical division in the chapters is repeated for each of the subsequent periods. Thus Chapters 6 and 7 deal with the Second World War and the period of reconstruction that followed. Everywhere the political saliency of planning rose to new heights. Major metropolitan strategic plans also appeared in many countries during the war or in the immediately following years. These built on earlier thinking but many also showed some novelty and reflected a complex international interplay of thought. Chapters 8 and 9 then show how the immediate concerns of postwar reconstruction gave way to a more full-blooded commitment to urban modernisation throughout the advanced capitalist world in the 1960s and 1970s. The common problems were now those of planning for mass affluence and especially motorisation. Everywhere the solutions revealed an almost boundless optimism about growth and technology. Yet the long international boom on which this optimism rested itself gave way to economic uncertainty during the 1970s, coinciding with widespread popular reactions against urban modernisation. The 1980s and 1990s, explored in Chapters 10 and 11, saw a dramatic recasting of the planning agenda. As a globalised market system emerged, planners were obliged to make cities into more competitive places, particularly where older industries had withered. The harder edge this gave to planning was meanwhile softened by the new mantra of sustainability, which asserted the need to make present growth respect longer term environmental and other values. To many planners, at least, this became the new guiding philosophy for their activity in the 21st century.

Finally, Chapter 12 draws together the main strands of the book, reviewing the relevance of the broad explanatory approaches we have spelled out in this chapter. There will, of course, be no big answer, but particular variables which have significantly affected the creation and global spread of urban planning will be specified. There will also be some final speculations about the directions urban planning is likely to take in the new century. Whether, in the event, these will prove as big a quantum leap as those of the later 19th and early 20th centuries may be doubted. It is with these earlier and fundamental changes that we begin.