

Twentieth century capital city Planning history

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The development of many capitals was influenced by planning ideas that began to blossom from 1890 to 1910. Some significant traditions from this period included Beaux Arts urbanism (and its American cousin the City Beautiful), Garden Cities and Modernism. The Beaux Arts tradition influenced many capital city plans early in the century because of the unusual symbolic content and representation required in capital city planning. This model influenced Washington's 1902 McMillan Commission plan, Canberra, New Delhi, Ottawa and several Latin American capitals. British garden city/garden suburb ideas also played a major role in the metropolitan regional planning of many capital cities. The most influential version of the garden city model was Patrick Abercrombie's 1944 Greater London Plan, which was a full realisation of Ebenezer Howard's "Social Cities" scheme. The garden city tradition provided a template for mid-twentieth century metropolitan planning, as it provided important precedents for dealing with the everyday lives of urban dwellers. However, it gave little guidance on the planning of the symbolic elements required for most capital cities. By mid-century the ideas of the Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM) appeared fresh and democratic. CIAM's leader, Le Corbusier, traveled widely and proposed visionary schemes for capital cities in Paris, Barcelona, Algiers, Buenos Aires, Rio and Chandigarh. Le Corbusier's Brazilian collaborators, Neimeyer and Costa planned Brasilia – the most influential Modern capital to date. The Modernist approach was the dominant design model for the monumental core of capital cities after 1950, but later examples began to attract criticism for their bombastic style.

As the century closed, some capitals were gingerly re-exploring their Beaux Arts roots. The diffusion of these recent capital city planning ideas was different and than the sedate pace of change in the nineteenth century. By the end of the twentieth century, jet travel and advanced communications technology made international collaboration for capital city planning routine.

Introduction

Several of the ancient capitals discussed in *Planning Twentieth-Century Capital Cities* (Gordon, 2004) represent hundreds of years of incremental urban growth (London, Paris, Rome) but most current capital cities became the seat of government of a nation-state during the twentieth century. The development of many of these capitals was influenced by modern planning ideas that began to blossom in a burst of ideas from 1890 to 1910 (Sutcliffe, 1981 and 1984; Ward, 2002). Some important traditions in early twentieth century planning were:

France's Beaux-Arts urbanisme (and its American cousin the City Beautiful), with innovations in large-scale design and grouping public buildings.

Germany's Städtebau with innovations in town extension and zoning.

Britain's Garden Cities and town planning with innovations in social housing and new towns.

American city planning with innovations in comprehensive plans, parks systems and City Efficient infrastructure plans (Ward, 2000)

Stephen Ward has provided a thorough description of how these planning traditions diffused through the advanced capitalist world in the twentieth century (Ward, 2002).

Ward's model of the diffusion of planning [see Table 1] differentiates between types of "borrowing" (synthetic; selective; undiluted) and plans that were forms of "imposition" (negotiated; contested; authoritarian). In synthetic borrowing, the role of indigenous planners is very high and the external role is minimal. The 1944 Greater London Plan, the 1956 Brasilia plan or the 1965 Paris SDAURP regional plan are examples where indigenous planners played dominant roles in creating and implementing innovative capital city plans. New Delhi's 1913 plan would be at the other extreme, as an example of authoritarian imposition of an external planning tradition by an imperial power.

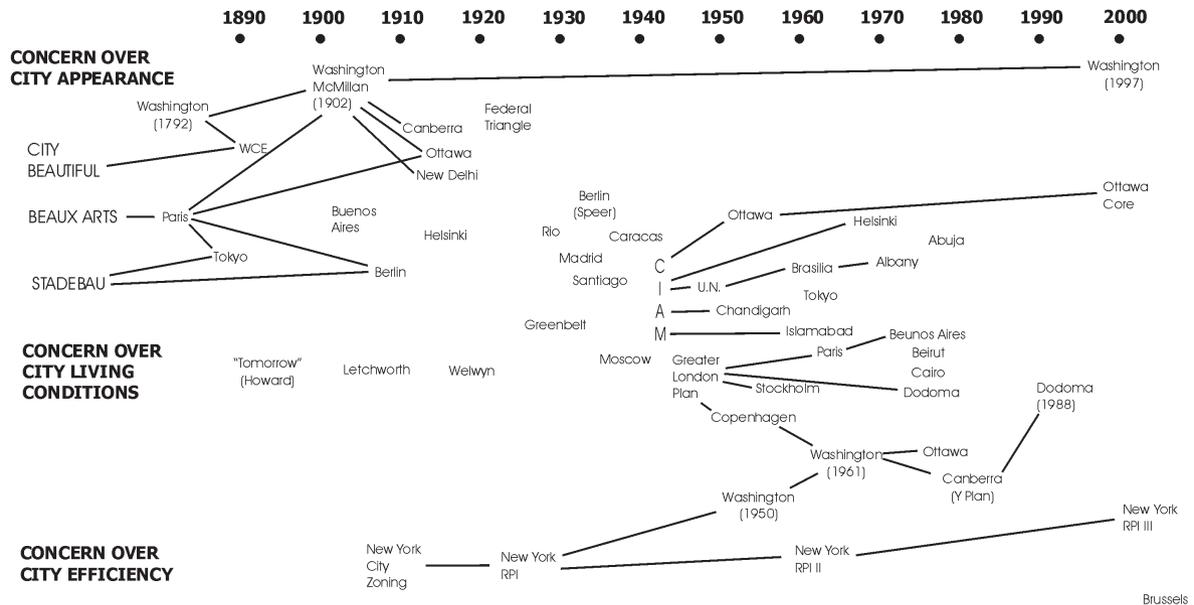


Table 1

Most twentieth century capital city planning could be classified as some form of undiluted or selective borrowing, using Ward's framework. Since most new capitals were created by the formation of a new nation-state, these cities had somewhat more choice of planning models than previous colonial settlements. Yet even relatively developed countries like Australia and Canada often lacked the specialised urban design and planning expertise to create a memorable capital city during the early twentieth century, so some borrowing was common. But there was wider variation in the implementation of the plans, and this is where the foreign models often ran into trouble, especially if they were far from their cultural homes. Although the smaller European countries and the British dominions engaged in selective or undiluted borrowing for their preparation of their plans, they retained control over implementation, smoothing the fit of the foreign models into the local context. At the other extreme, Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret were intimately involved in the implementation of Chandigarh's government and residential development, and permitted little deviation from their Modernist vision.

As several observers have noted, (Vale, 2004; Taylor and Andrew, 2004; Rapoport, 1993) most countries have borrowed a limited range of options for capital city planning, with Beaux Arts Paris and Modernist Brasilia as archetypes. The unusual requirements of symbolic content and representation in capital city planning gave some early priority to the urban design innovations from the Beaux Arts tradition. But the dominance of urbanisme as a model for early twentieth century capital planning was sealed by Paris' position as the epitome of urban sophistication in 1900 (Hall, 1997; Sutcliffe, 1993; Sutcliffe, 1970; Hall, 1998; Hall, 2002). Although Haussmann had resigned some thirty years previously, the transformation of Paris remained the paradigm in capital city planning for the first half of the twentieth century. Many plans for other national capitals followed its traditions and some were prepared by graduates of the Ecole de Beaux Arts itself [see Illustration 1].

Beaux Arts influence upon Washington's 1902 McMillan Commission plan occurred both directly and indirectly. Of course, L'Enfant's original 1792 plan was influenced by the capital of his homeland, but his Washington plan had almost been abandoned a century later. In the late 19th century, an influential group of American-born designers rediscovered European urbanism, first coming to prominence as the designers of Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition (WCE). Although the fair's chief planner, Daniel Burnham, was not a graduate of the Ecole de Beaux Arts, he associated with several graduates of the famous Parisien school for most of his urban design projects (Hines, 1974; Moore, 1921; Gournay, 1999). After their appointment to the Senate Parks Commission for Washington, Burnham led Charles McKim and F.L. Olmsted Jr. on a whirlwind tour of Paris and Rome. Many photographs of European precedents illustrated their 1902 report (Moore, 1902).

The 1902 Washington plan and Burnham and Bennett's 1908 *Plan of Chicago* were heavily promoted within the US, and well-known abroad. Paris and Washington certainly influenced the pre-World War I capital city plans for Canberra, New Delhi and Ottawa. Christopher Vernon has noted the influence of Washington and Chicago on Walter Burley Griffin's 1912 Canberra plan. Edwin Lutyens brought plans of Paris and Washington to Delhi to assist in the 1913 designs of the imperial capital (Irving, 1981). The first two plans for Canada's capital were prepared by Frederick Todd, who trained in Olmsted's office and by Burnham's associate, Edward H. Bennett (Gordon, 1998, 2002). Both used Paris and Washington precedents in their reports. Bennett later chaired the design committee for Washington's Federal Triangle (Todd, 1903; Canada, Federal Plan Commission for Ottawa and Hull, 1916; Tompkins, 1992).

Paris was also the most important precedent for the planning of Latin American capitals in the early twentieth century. Arturo Almandoz also reports that several prominent French urbanistes contributed to the planning of Buenos Aires (Bouvard 1907), Rio (Agache 1926), Havana (Forestier 1926) and Caracas (Rotival 1930s) (Almandoz, 2002).

Other capital cities were influenced by different varieties of European urban design. Ende and Böekmann's 1886 plan for Tokyo's Government Quarter appears to combine German and French design elements. Helsinki's 1915 (Jung) and 1918 (Saarinen) plans extended the city's nineteenth century traditions with a sophisticated awareness of other European precedents.

The 1908-1910 Berlin planning competition and exhibition attracted leading European urban designers, like France's Jausseley, and further publicised the work of German urbanists. Karl Brunner later prepared plans for Santiago (1933), Panama City (1941) and Bogotá (1940s), (Almandoz, 2002) while Hermann Jansen was consultant to Madrid (1930) and Ankara (1932) (Ward, 2002).

Perhaps the last of the capital city plans to be influenced by the urbaniste tradition was the 1950 *Plan for Canada's Capital* prepared by Ecole des Beaux Arts graduate Jacques Gréber and Canadian associates. The urban design proposals in the plan were classically composed, but this was a transitional plan, promiscuously borrowing from American parks system planning, CIAM and City Efficient functional planning, and from the 1944 *Greater London Plan* for its greenbelt (Gordon, 2001; Gournay, 2001).

The Garden City Model

The British garden city/garden suburb tradition played a major role in the metropolitan regional planning of many capital cities. The international influence of this model is well documented (Hall, 2002; Ward, 1994; Watanabe, 1980; Watanabe, 1992; Stein, 1951). Letchworth, Welwyn Garden City and Hampstead Garden Suburb were followed by the Parisien cité-jardins (garden suburbs) and the garden city elements of Semionov's 1935 Moscow plan (Ward, 2002; Lang, 1996). Early American variations included important New York precedents from Olmsted and Atterbury's 1911 Forest Hills Gardens and Stein and Wright's 1926 Radburn (Klaus, 2002; Stein, 1951). These projects influenced the 1926-30 *Regional Plan for New York* and the Greenbelt new towns, but more importantly, they developed Clarence Perry's neighbourhood unit concept, which quickly spread to the residential plans of most national capitals and many other city plans (Perry, 1929).

The most influential version of the garden city model was Patrick Abercrombie's *Greater London Plan 1944*. This was a full realisation of Ebenezer Howard's "Social Cities" regional scheme with a greenbelt and satellite new towns (Howard, 1898; Hall and Ward, 1998). Stein took the neighbourhood unit back across the Atlantic to Stevenage new town (Parsons, 1992) and a powerful regional planning paradigm was complete: greenbelts, radial transportation corridors and new towns with residential areas developed in neighbourhood units. Important metropolitan planning variations on these themes quickly emerged in Copenhagen (1947), Ottawa (1950), Stockholm (1952), Washington (1961) and Paris (1965) [see Illustration 1]. The new town designed with neighbourhood units became a common theme for greenfield Political Capitals like Chandigarh (1950), Brasilia (1956), Islamabad (1960s), Canberra (1970) and Dodoma (1976). A second generation of diffusion included the participation of Milton Keynes' planners in Nigeria's Abuja (1970s) and Australian planners in revising Dodoma's plan (1988). Most of these plans appear to be undiluted or selective borrowing, according to Ward's classification, but the 1965 Paris SDAURP plan was a distinctive synthesis of international regional planning theory and practice (Ward, 2002; Hall, 1998). The Parisien planners later acted as consultants for the 1969 Buenos Aires plan and 1970s plans for Beirut, Tunis, Cairo and Phnom Penh (Ward, 2000).

The garden city/new town tradition provided a template for mid-twentieth century metropolitan planning that was useful in capital city planning, too. The model provided

important precedents for dealing with the everyday lives of urban dwellers – residential areas, open space, transportation and service centres. But these are the elements of cities that are found in every urban area, whether the seat of government is present or not. The garden city model, however, gives little guidance on the planning of the symbolic elements that are required for most capital cities. The garden city model may be particularly desirable as the major planning approach when the sponsoring political regime wishes to showcase planning for working class communities like communist Moscow (1935) and socialist Dodoma (1976). But even within these contexts, more attention was added to symbolic content. Stalin commissioned many monumental structures, while new urban designers were added to plan Dodoma's National Capital Centre and hilltop parliament (Rossant, 1996). Setting a good example in planning the vernacular city is a laudable objective, but it appears that governments also want more visible and inspirational results if significant funds drawn from across the country are invested in the national capital.

Two significant North American planning traditions appear to have had little influence on capital city planning. The innovations in regional natural systems planning pioneered by Parks Movement leaders like Frederick Law Olmsted Sr. were important components of the 1902 Washington and 1903/1915 Ottawa plans. Although most subsequent capital city plans addressed open space issues, they were often not major components until late in the century, when ecological planning and sustainable development became important objectives.

Similarly, the American City Scientific/City Efficient innovations saw little diffusion into the case studies in *Planning Twentieth-Century Capital Cities* beyond the New York Regional Plans. Efficient infrastructure was an important theme in metropolitan planning schemes like Brussels' regional plans and Canberra's 1970 'Y' plan, which imported American transportation planning expertise. But these plans seem to be more related to their metropolitan growth issues than to the urban areas' role as capital cities.

The Modernist Model

The Beaux Arts/City Beautiful tradition influenced capital city planning throughout the first half of the twentieth century precisely because it was a proven model for dealing with capital city elements like a capitol complex, monuments and public spaces. But the model was a bit tired by mid-century and severely tainted by its association with totalitarian regimes in Germany, Italy and Russia. In contrast, the ideas of the Congrès Internationaux d' Architecture Moderne (CIAM) appeared to be fresh and democratic. Although these young avant-garde architects had built few major projects between the wars, they elaborated an urban planning model (the Athens Charter) that was intended to be widely applicable (Sert, 1947; Mumford, 2002). The CIAM's leader, Le Corbusier, had travelled widely and proposed visionary schemes for capital cities in Paris (1925), Barcelona (1934), Algiers (1930-1934), Buenos Aires (1929) and Rio (1929). But all that came out of these efforts were some drawings admired in intellectual circles and a collaboration on the design of Rio's 1936 Ministry of Education building with Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer (Almandoz, 2002 ; Evenson, 1973).

Le Corbusier got his big break in capital city planning in 1947 when he was appointed to the Board of Design for New York's UN Headquarters, chaired by Wallace Harrison. Le Corbusier influenced the design process and developed a super-block plan with Brazil's Oscar Niemeyer (Dudley, 1994). Construction of the high profile project was complete by 1951, by which time Le Corbusier had already been appointed to replace Albert Mayer and the late Mathew Nowicki at Chandigarh. As explained by Nihal Perera in our book, Le Corbusier quickly seized control of the Chandigarh planning process, changed the scale of Mayer's plan, and kept the design of the

capital complex (“la tête”) for himself. The road grid was re-calibrated to Paris’ 800m bus-stop spacing and the blocks and buildings had no relation to the Indian climate or way of life. They were designed using the *modulor*, a system of proportions based upon the height of a European male, which had little to do with the women, or men, of India (Evenson, 1975). The dramatic design of the monumental complex attracted praise at first, but eventually the cultural and technical failings of the other elements of the plan drew strong criticism. But while Chandigarh’s star was still bright, the Modern approach influenced other capitals in the sub-continent including Bhubaneswar and Gandhinagar in India (Kalia, 1999) and Doxiadis’ Islamabad and Kahn’s Dhaka plans in Pakistan.

Le Corbusier’s Brazilian collaborators from Rio and the UN outshone their mentor. Niemeyer and Costa’s Brasilia is the most influential Modern capital, and the only twentieth century plan on UNESCO’s list of World Heritage sites. The monumental axis of the Pilot plan draws upon Beaux Arts planning principles, but the scale is enlarged and the buildings and public spaces are thoroughly Modern. Brazil’s new capital is an example of ‘synthetic’ borrowing within Ward’s typology, with a dominant indigenous role in planning and implementation, based upon the country’s well-developed traditions in Modern architecture.

Lawrence Vale (1993) describes other Modern capital-capitol complexes in the urban design chapter in our book, and also in his *Architecture, Power and National Identity*. The Modernist approach was the dominant design model for the monumental core of capital cities after 1950, but later examples began to attract criticism for their bombastic style, especially Wallace Harrison’s Nelson Rockefeller Plaza for the New York state capital in Albany.

As the century closed, some capitals were gingerly re-exploring their Beaux Arts roots. The ghost of Hitler’s Germania seems more faint in Washington, Ottawa and Canberra, which are re-planning the monumental cores of their capitals with selective borrowing from their City Beautiful past. Berlin, of course, must tread more carefully. It developed a practice of “critical reconstruction” – Modern buildings within a traditional framework of streets, blocks and public spaces. But for the government precinct, great care was taken not to invoke the ghosts of the past: the new buildings are Modern and the main axis runs east-west, rather than Speer’s over-scaled 1940 north-south plan. It is a bit early to tell, but Berlin’s careful reconstruction may also be an example of a distinctive plan produced by synthetic borrowing from a wide range of sources.

Diffusion of capital city planning ideas was different and faster in the twentieth century than the sedate pace of change in the nineteenth (Hall, 1997). The diffusion mechanisms changed early in the century, with international conferences and specialist journals for planning. *Town Planning Review* disseminated the most interesting plans from the 1910 RIBA conference within the year. The planners of Canberra, New Delhi and Ottawa were influenced by designs that were less than a decade old. The rise of the international planner (Prost; Agache; Jansen; Le Corbusier; Mayer; Doxiadis, Gréber) accelerated the pace of diffusion by mid-century (Ward, 2000). Abercrombie’s 1944 *Greater London Plan* was influencing new capital city plans in Scandinavia and Canada even before its implementation began in earnest. By the end of the century, jet travel and advanced communications technology has made international collaboration (including this book) easier than ever before. Capital city planners can monitor the latest plan proposals in Lower Manhattan, London and Canberra almost in real time. Reports, precedents, images and critiques that would have taken Daniel Burnham decades to assemble tumble off a high-speed Internet connection.

And yet, although we are now buried in information, it seems like the pace of real innovation in capital city planning remains agonisingly slow. The new Berlin is emerging from over a decade of national debate, local agitation, international competitions and adjustments during implementation. Its potential for a distinctive contribution to capital city planning rests

on decades of post-war experiments, some distinguished competitions, and contributions from an engaged citizenry and a strong planning academy. In other words, its planning history contributes to its planning practice.

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