

## Town Planning versus *Urbanismo*

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Giorgio Piccinato (1987) has explained the distinction between *urbanismo* and *town planning* as follows. Town planning is Anglo-Saxon, urbanism is Latin. Planning sees itself as a professional activity distinct from architecture and engineering, urbanism is a shared culture or common ground between these professions. Planning is rooted in social reformism, giving its practitioners a happy sense of their own rectitude, urbanism owes more to the pluralism of real urban politics. Anglo-Saxon planning dominated the post-war years with its social-democratic values and its simple scenario of planners (good) versus speculators (bad). Piccinato observes that Leonardo Benevolo opened the history of modern planning, in his widely-read *Le Origini dell' Urbanistica Moderna* (1963), with Robert Owen's social experiment at New Lanark. In Italian encyclopedias and texts of the 1960s 'urbanistica' used to be synonymous with new towns and housing policy. But this hegemony of Anglo-Saxon attitudes had been broken. Its social reform project was discredited and its elaborate apparatus of paper-based socio-economic regulation had stalled. For Piccinato, the future rested with an *urbanismo* that allowed architects to take tangible and realisable responsibility for urban space.

Here at the conclusion of IPHS2004 in Barcelona, the Gordon Cherry Memorial lecture offers a perfect opportunity to revisit

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the distinction between town planning and urbanism. Cherry was Anglo-Saxon planning personified. Born in 1931 and educated as a geographer, he entered local government in 1953 and became a leading figure in the fight to establish town planning as a professional discipline in its own right. One of his earliest published papers - 'The Town Planner and his Profession' (1962) - was an angry young man's attack on the supercilious attitude of architects, engineers, and surveyors towards a town planning profession which they regarded as inferior and secondary. Cherry called upon universities to focus their educational curricula onto the planner's distinctive attributes, which he defined as the promotion of 'amenity and convenience'. He summonsed the Town Planning Institute to be more aggressive in advancing the profession's cause.

For the next five years, from 1963-8, he would work as Research Officer in the City Planning Department of Newcastle upon Tyne under Wilfred Burns, who was then one of the very few British town planners to hold the post of chief officer and head his own department within the city administration. Cherry described the winning of chief officer positions in Newcastle and other cities as 'Battle Honours in the war of attrition . . . to secure professional recognition'. It is one of the milestones in the Diamond Jubilee history of the Royal Town Planning Institute (Cherry 1974), a narrative of the long march of the chartered town planning profession from small beginnings in 1914 to the granting of a

Royal Charter (1970), establishment of university programmes, a membership of thousands, and general public recognition. In this narrative, Cherry's view of professional town planning matches Giorgio Piccinato's. He does not see it as a design profession: its techniques derive from social science and its values from social reformism. He himself had a powerful sense of this reformist legacy, being as active the Bournville Village Trust (trustee, chairman 1992-6) as he was in the Royal Town Planning Institute (service on its Council for a quarter of a century, Presidency 1978-9, Outstanding Service Medal 1995).

Cherry left Newcastle City Council in 1968 to become Deputy Director of the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) at the University of Birmingham. Entering academic life at the age of 37, he had a short but intensive university career. By the time of his death, age only 65, he had authored or co-authored nine books, edited a further four, and (with Tony Sutcliffe) launched both the journal *Planning Perspectives* and the Spon book series *Studies in History, Planning and Environment*. Above all, he had first founded and nurtured the Planning History Group then transformed it into an International Planning History Society, an improbable concept brought to life by his own sheer energy and enthusiasm. Glimpsed on an envelope in the daily pile of post, Gordon's handwriting was instantly recognisable - regular, rounded, relentless. His hand expressed both the talent for personal friendship by which he nurtured our global network of scholarship, and the qualities of genial persistence by which he shaped it into institutional permanence. We are all in his debt.

The two sides of Gordon Cherry's career fit together like an arch. In his writing of planning history we are always aware of that teleological drive towards independent professional status within a freestanding policy sector. Planning's progress is defined

by its shift from architectural design towards 'a wider, interpretative fusion to a concern with social welfare' (1982 147). Planning historiography takes a parallel path from art history to social sciences (1981 4). The roots of the narrative are Anglo-centric, finding the reward for Britain's role in the Industrial Revolution in its pioneering of garden cities and green belts. Cherry helped to articulate a sense of national leadership of a worldwide movement, a notion which - despite the best efforts of Stephen Ward (2002) - undergraduates somehow still imbibe and regurgitate in the summer examinations :

*These many events make the profession of Town Planning what it is today and helps British Town Planning be amongst the most successful in the world.*

Gordon himself was a good enough historian to recognise that this march of progress had not been altogether straightforward. The definition of our subject which he bequeathed to the IPHS website is '*planning as a process, with all the quirks of the unexpected en route*'. False hopes and disappointments are a recurring theme in his writing, discouraging any optimism about the making of place or the shaping of space. He regarded the city as a 'tantalizingly indifferent' mechanism for sustaining social contact or inspiring human aims and ideals (1972 246).

A long established European idea of urbanism is breaking down... Form is disintegrating and the city is vanishing as a central embodiment of collective art and technics. New systems of communication have exploded the centuries-old association between place and people. Suburban culture is quite different, and a loose metropolitan form of cities will change the urban way of life (1972 241).

As an academic geographer Gordon Cherry arrived at the bleak conclusion that these polyform processes of metropolitan change were uncontrollable, and planners' efforts to shape them doomed to disappointment (1982 149). Perhaps it was his sense of an impasse in contemporary town planning

that made him focus his energies so productively on the past.

One point on which the narratives of Giorgio Piccinato and Gordon Cherry coincide is the international impact of Anglo-Saxon planning in the immediate postwar years. It extended even to France, birthplace of *urbanisme*. Raymond Unwin, Lewis Mumford and the Reith Report were guiding influences in the *Nouvel Urbanisme* of the 1950s (Cohen 1996). At the high water mark, the Sorbonne's I'UUP (Institut d'Urbanisme de l'Université de Paris) replaced its conventional syllabus of architectural design and urban history with a curriculum of law, social science and management theory. Henri Léfèbvre, who taught social theory at the institute, advised his students that their new role-model was the robot-planner, pulling apart the living tissue of towns so as to recombine the pieces into the synthetic commodity-ensembles required by international neo-capitalism. Out in the *villes nouvelles*, planning's supposed modernisation created landscapes of repression and submission to the 'poisonous flower' of Americanization. The Institute was appropriately punished after the 1968 riots by relocation to the singularly unpleasant concrete campus of Université de Paris XII-Créteil, but Léfèbvre and his fellow-critics of the Anglo-Saxon functionalist model brought about a lasting paradigm shift in the discipline. From 1970 onwards *urbanisme* meant a return to the urban spaces of street and square, with their complexity and richness of memory, and a return to the mother-discipline of architecture.

Similar episodes were taking place all over Europe as students and workers took to the streets to defend 'the street'. An urbanism purged of Anglo-Saxon influences became the universal counter-project to town planning (Ellin 1996). Its object, as defined in the seminal work of Aldo Rossi, was the 'architecture of the city', a *gestalt* of building

and urban space shaped by time and infused by collective memory. Urbanism reoccupied a terrain that had been abandoned by modernism, the intermediate scale between the global concerns of the economic planner and the architectural building-as-object (Solà-Morales 1997). Its defining methodology was analysis of plan-form (Moudon 1994), first through the elaborate typomorphological surveys of Saverio Muratori, Gianfranco Caniggia and Carlo Aymonino, then through a widening repertoire of cadastral study, figure-ground mapping and spatial typology to which seminal contributions were made by Jean Castex and Philippe Panerai (*Formes Urbaines* 1977), Robert Krier (*Stadtraum in Theorie und Praxis* 1975), Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter (*Collage City* 1978) and Christopher Alexander (*Pattern Language* 1977).

Searching a postmodern meaning for urbanity and citizenship, its intellectual roots extended into richer territory than Ebenezer Howard's late Victorian temperance utopia: to the idealism of Henri Bergson (Calabi 1996), to Maurice Halbwachs' concept of collective memory (Rossi 1982), and the critical rationalism of Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt school (Berndt 1967). The movement's engagement with the city was highly practical, emphasizing *project* over *plan*. As Henri Léfèbvre had hoped, urbanism became principal instrument in the European left's efforts to revive the legitimacy of municipal politics and reconnect it to the grassroots of neighbourhood activism. Formative episodes were the battle for La Marolle in Brussels, the mass squatting along the metro line in Amsterdam, the community-based renewal of the historic centre of Bologna, and the anti-freeway coalition of squatters, immigrants and environmentalists who saved the Luisenstadt quarter of Berlin.

The last-mentioned episode led in the 1980s to the new urbanism's equivalent of Letchworth Garden City, a bold demonstration project with international resonance, the international building exhibition IBA-Berlin, (Kleihues and Klotz 1986, Uhlig 1994,

Kündiger 1997). Under the non-Anglo-Saxon motto 'the inner city as a place to live', organisers Josef Paul Kleihues and Hardt-Walter Hämer declared a clean break with postwar traditions of land use zoning, town planning and highway engineering. Aiming to 'rebuild the city of streets', they looked to Franco-Italian morphological methods to put new life into the historic forms of perimeter street-block and courtyard tenement. IBA combined contextual design with grassroots community participation in a process known as *critical reconstruction*. It involved a hundred architects, a third of them non-German - including Carlo Aynonimo, Peter Eisenman, Bernard Huet, Aldo Rossi, Colin Rowe, Alvaro Siza and James Stirling - and intense publicity both for the initial drawings exhibited at the Milan Triennale of 1985 (de Michelis 1985) and for the real buildings which would soon make Berlin 'la Mecque des architectes et gestionnaires de l'urbain' (Bédarida 1985). There was deliberately wide stylistic variation amongst the architectural contributions within the common morphological framework, though it did not stretch as far as Rem Koolhaas, who dropped out of IBA-Berlin at an early stage on the grounds that instead of romantically trying to revive its streets the stagnant (pre-unification) city should be decentralising into a picturesque territorial archipelago, 'a system of architectural islands surrounded by forests and lakes' (Koolhaas 1989). That was exactly the modernist future from which most urbanists were agreed they wanted to escape.

I am afraid Rem Koolhaas may have been turned off by the minority of IBA participants more interested in neohistorical revivalism than critical reconstruction. In those turbulent times political radicalism could find itself in bed with strange companions. Thus, Léon Krier's contribution to the fight against the onward march of International style office towers was a cartoon-like propaganda for a 'rational architecture' of pediments, columns

and cornice lines (Krier 1978). His slogan *L'avenir à reculons* combined the rhetoric of class struggle with a utopian evocation of preindustrial neighbourhoods (Barey 1980):

For the first time in the history of architecture since the Industrial Revolution there appears a coherent European project capable of opposing the brutal repercussions of profit - a convergence of thought, a convergence of directions (Culot and Krier 1978)

The convergence in the minds of Maurice Culot and Léon Krier was of a revived urbanism with a return to artisan skills, stone building and the timeless aesthetic of the classical orders (Galle and Thanassekos 1984). With seriously rich patrons and clients replacing Marxist agitprop, architectural ultraconservatives have sustained this imagery through a series of overlapping networks - the Movement for the Reconstruction of the European City, *l'altra Modernità*, Urban Renaissance, the New Architecture Group, Vision for Europe and the Council for European Urbanism. Suggesting that wealthy private clients had a better sense of public preferences than the modernist-dominated establishment, Krier hailed Seaside, Kentlands, Poundbury, Port Grimaud, Potsdam-Drewitz and La Heredia as 'the first concrete demonstrations of a form of modernity that is not alienating, kitsch or aggressive but serene and urbane' (Krier 1998 16).

Classical pastiche may have some merit as a basis for infill schemes in historic towns but is hardly a mode of modernity. The attempt to claim this architecture for the revival of European urbanism has been equally harmful for history and for urbanism, reinforcing mainstream architectural opinion against both. The stronger the link between architecture and urbanism in a handful of traditionalist academies such as San Sebastian, Notre Dame and Ferrara, the less its influence elsewhere. In the US the impetus of the Congress for New Urbanism has been stalled by its association with neo-trad design and the same is true of the Prince of Wales's modest attempts at institution-building in the UK.

Europe's most ambitious urban design experiment, the morphological reconstruction of post-*Wende* Berlin has been dragged into acrimonious controversy by neohistoricist design requirements. While IBA-Berlin of 1984-7 demonstrated the scope for architectural diversity within the common frame of critical reconstruction, the post-unification *Planwerk Innenstadt Berlin* has, rightly or wrongly, become associated with a reactionary homage to Schinkel: stone facades, uniform cornice heights and vertical windows (Ladd 1997, Neill & Schwedler 2001).

Javier Monclus reminds us that twenty years ago Oriol Bohigas cited Berlin as the clearest exemplar of the new urbanism:

a reconstruction of the centre starting from the absolute respect for the road and the traditional form of the street (2003 406).

Today, urbanism in Berlin stands compromised by neohistoricist dogma. By common consent the exemplar city for European urbanism today is one as celebrated for its contemporary architecture as for the restored continuities of its streets, plazas, boulevards, parks and promenades: Barcelona.

In Spain the switch from town planning to urbanism was heightened by the death of Franco and the transition to democracy. Town planning had been an intrusive presence during the last decades of the dictatorship. In the opening up of the Spanish economy under the aegis of the World Bank, a speculative building boom had been facilitated by highways construction and a relaxation of building controls. The suburbs of Spanish cities began to take a loose autocentric form, with free-standing blocks in a dusty 'hypertrophy' of public open space (Lopez de Lucio 1995 15). By the time of the first municipal elections in 1979 there was widespread public demand for measures to stop the erosion of urban quarters and *desperdigamiento urbana*, that is, sprawl. Out went Anglo-Saxon planning and in came

a physical urbanism - *fiscalismo* - bringing the techniques of Italian and French morphology to repair the public realm, revive the block, reclaim streets and boulevards from *obras publicas*, and restore the dignity of urban greenspace (Gotlieb 1998).

Barcelona was bound to be at the forefront of the new urbanism (Monclus 2003). Historically the city embodies Europe's most extraordinary morphological experiment, the 1859 extension plan of Ildefons Cerdà. Cerdà almost invented the word *urbanismo* - his neologism was *urbanizacion* - and the *Eixample* still provides a point of departure for comparative analysis of urban form (Magrinya & Tarrago 1996). Already before Franco's death, Catalan architects were deploying the rigorous morphological techniques of the Italian school in oppositional community-based 'counterplans'. The counterplan for Poble Nou published by Manuel de Solà-Morales and colleagues in 1974 was one of Europe's earliest systematic exercises in repair of an urban quarter. Solà-Morales recalls the radical impact within Barcelona next year, when Philippe Panerai and Jean Castex published the first edition of *Formes Urbaines*, their powerful study of the 'agony' of the European street block (Panerai 1997). Over the next three decades Barcelona's *Laboratorio de Urbanismo* would be an international centre of excellence both for its practical assistance to towns and neighbourhoods wrestling with development pressure, and as the Iberian point of entry for practitioners such as Aldo Rossi, Carlo Aymonino (IUAV, Venice), Philippe Panerai (Versailles) and Josef-Paul Kleihues (IBA-Berlin). And, from 1980 onwards, the municipality of Barcelona would give *urbanismo* the highest quality of political attention under its three Socialist mayors, Narcis Serra, Paqual Maragall and Joan Clos.

Appointed head of urbanism in the restored democratic municipality, Oriol Bohigas's first reaction was an excoriating attack on town planning. His paper 'Barcelona, el urbanismo no es posible' (1981) closely resembled the contemporary

onslaught on British planners by Mrs Thatcher's cabinet minister Michael Heseltine. Bohigas and Heseltine had both made successful careers in commercial publishing and found nothing to admire in multi-volume development plans - our library shelves are still full of them - the cherished output of procedural planning, supposedly comprehensive documents supported by elaborate consultation, chapters of socio-economic analysis and elaborate but senseless phasing provisions. As Bohigas observed, long term planning is a 'sin of pride' permitted only to despots. While planners spent their time on *planeamientos*, their vacuous bureaucratic diversion allowed speculators to plunder historic districts and public works engineers to destroy the public realm in the name of traffic efficiency (Bohigas 1981, 1999).

In his four years as a city functionary, Bohigas aimed to *desplanificar* Barcelona. From Mayors Serra and Maragall he sought and got control over the public works department, releasing the municipal technicians from their technical isolation, and making them partners in the sequence of outstanding boulevard designs and public realm improvements around the city. He brought in the private sector as a development partner in neighbourhood revitalization. Resources and energy were focussed into 150 concrete projects and the general policy framework was left on the shelf. Though Bohigas's full-time commitment to the municipality ended in 1984 the momentum of project focus was brilliantly sustained by Josep Acebillo as Director of Urban Projects 1980-88 and Director of the Municipal Institute for Urbanistic Promotions in 1988-93.

From his reflections upon Barcelona Bohigas has drawn a general proposition that urbanism should be based on *projects* rather than *plans* (Bohigas 1999, Monclus 2003). It so happened that the *Plan General de Madrid* of the 1985 - self-styled 'spearhead of the new urbanism' - came down equally strongly in favour of an urbanism of *plans* rather than *projects* (Lopez de Lucio 1995, de

Terán 1999). Significant issues have been raised in the debate between plan and project, top-down versus bottom up. However, in practice Barcelona and Madrid combined both approaches, as did other Spanish cities (Gotleib 1998, Gaja 1999, Monclus 2003). The common ground was what Manuel de Solà Morales (1987) called an *urbanismo urbano* - a morphological urbanism, respectful of embedded memory, combining precise initiatives with a global vision, which in Barcelona centred around reintegration of the suburbs and a bold reorientation to the sea, crystallised in Olympic projects and their supporting infrastructure.

The city's urbanism has its limitations. Javier Monclús (2003) reminds us to see the design achievements of the historic centre and *ensanches* of the core city against their wider setting of an unsustainable and apparently uncontrollable sprawl. Here as elsewhere in Europe the most urgent tasks for spatial planning are on the metropolitan scale. Rem Koolhaas (1995) would have us think that the one annuls the other, and that the face of the future is to be found in the sprawl, not the consolidated city. I prefer to think the reverse is true. The multiple challenges of diffuse metropolitan growth can only be tackled through consolidation, place-making, the creation of new centralities. The solution to the sprawl is to be found in the centre. American New Urbanism, by the way, sees this well (Leccese and McCormick 2000, Hebbert 2003).

What CNU doesn't always see is how to encourage architectural creatives back into the urban canyon. Barcelona's most precious contribution to urbanism is less the primacy of projects over plans than the dialogue between urbanism and contemporary architecture. The city has reinstated the primacy of the street, the square, the park and the public realm without any compromise to its century-long affair with modernism. The European school of neotraditionalism has never gained a foothold in Barcelona (Monclus 2003 404). Again, we should acknowledge the seminal role of Oriol

Bohigas, which extends far beyond his two stints with the municipality as officer and elected politician. In 1981, the year he took responsibility for urbanism in Barcelona, his practice MBM had taken first prize in IBA-Berlin for their project for a city block in Friedrichstadt. As an architectural historian and commercial practitioner, and head of the Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura, he took a very different architectural stance from romantic non-practitioners such as Léon Krier and Maurice Culot. One constant throughout his long career has been the desire to reconcile sense of place with modernity. The enigmatic title 'Grup R' which he adopted with Josep Martorell in 1951 stood equally for regionalism, for realism and for rationalism. While staunchly upholding the principle of morphological continuity, Bohigas has not accepted architectural pastiche - in his words, 'historical stylised buildings do not make a historical city' (Drew 1993, Frampton 1996). Barcelona's street-based urbanism may be called 'traditional', but it never seeks to annul the formal and typological conquests of the modern movement :

This is surely one of the most interesting challenges of the new urban design. It is not trying to reorganise urban space with residential typologies borrowed from the Baroque or Neo-classicism, but to give them enough autonomy and articulation to allow cohabitation with the constructional formulae already endorsed by the modern movement. (Bohigas 1987 73)

Bohigas has continued to wrestle with these challenges. His manifesto *Ten Points on an Urbanistic Methodology* (1999) calls equally for architecture that innovates and challenges custom, and for an urbanism that sustains the shared urban language of street, square, block and park. We can see the working of that dialectic of received typology and inventive form in the Nova Icaria Olympic Village, master-planned by MBMP, which the Royal Institute of British Architects singled out in 1999 when, for the first time since

1848, it awarded the Royal Gold Medal not to an individual but 'to Barcelona, its government, its citizens and design professionals of all sorts' (JA 1999).

Josep Acebillo and Oriol Bohigas travelled to London in 1999 with the three Socialist mayors to receive the RIBA Gold Medal. Presenting the five men at the award ceremony, Robert Maxwell drew a contrast which I think you will recognise :

City planning is a modern subject, about as old as modern architecture, almost as old as Le Corbusier's concept of *urbanism*. But does this subject really exist?... City planning was meant to be a science, but standards change as fast as the practical measures taken, so that evaluation becomes difficult. Analytical concepts may not last for very long, statistics have little effect on appearances... Attempts to reshape existing cities like our own Birmingham, using analytical concepts like *motorway box*, *neighbourhood unit*, *tower block* have not been very successful. Appearances have been against them... Could it be that city planners need to be more sensitive to what buildings can do to shape the city and give it meaning? Because this seems to have been the crucial idea that has resulted in the conspicuous success of Barcelona. (JA 1999)

Maxwell went on to acknowledge Aldo Rossi as the inspirational text. Scientific town planning had failed. An urbanism based upon *Architecture of the City* succeeds.

So we come full circle to Giorgio Piccinato and the eclipse of the Anglo-Saxon concept of planning as 'process'. The full significance of the Gold Medal became apparent when Pasquall Maragall came back to London to help launch the report of an Urban Task Force chaired by the architect Richard Rogers, *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (1999, Hebbert 2001). Maragall's radiant optimism about the role of the cities

as centres of creativity and exchange proved infectious for Anglo-Saxons. With Birmingham in the lead, British cities have been rediscovering the power of a morphological strategy for the public realm. National policy guidance and frameworks began to speak the language of European urbanism, albeit with an American New Urbanist accent. The Royal Town Planning Institute redefined its professional mission, giving less emphasis to procedure and process, and more to *fisicalismo* - the mediation of space, the making of place. Reducing postgraduate programmes to a mere twelve months it tacitly abandoned that historic claim of equivalent professional standing to the architect and the engineer.

This has been a paper about a struggle between two paradigms. Paradoxically for a memorial lecture its outcome is the triumphant ascendancy of the urbanism paradigm represented by Barcelona over the model of planning to which Gordon Cherry committed his life-work. This may seem strange homage, but to quote again from his words on the IPHS home page, the history of planning is a journey with all the quirks of the unexpected en route. He might have been surprised at the turn in our discipline, but he would have been proud of Birmingham's leading role. He would be delighted at the geographical range and quality of scholarship assembled at the conference. Who could ask for a better legacy than IPHS2004 Barcelona ?

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Work on urbanism includes "New Urbanism - the Movement in Context" (*Built Environment* 2003), "A City in Good Shape : town planning and public health" (*Town Planning Review* 1999), *London: More by Fortune than Design* (1998), 'The City of London Walkway Experiment' (*Journal of the American Planning Association* 1993), 'Town Planner as Social Scientist' (*Society and Space* 1992), *How Tokyo Grows - planning and land development on the metropolitan fringe* (with Norihiro Nakai 1988), and several book chapters on aspects of the history of the garden cities movement, London government, Spanish regionalism, Japanese planning and other topics.

