
NOTES ON THE URBAN PROBLEM

Author(s): Barbara Ward

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increase the anarchic and amorphous picture in our towns, big or small ones. Future generations will not judge us by the highest achievements of single buildings, like the Ministry of Education in Rio, Mies Van De Rohe's buildings in Chicago, or even

Rond-champs and La Tourette—but only by our success or failure in creating human living conditions for the millions who are concentrated in, and still streaming into, the town centers all over the world.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE SCIENCE OF EKISTICS*

INTRODUCTORY PAPERS

1. NOTES ON THE URBAN PROBLEM

Barbara Ward

A QUICK LOOK AT THE CRISIS

There is no need in this paper to outline again the scale of our present urban crisis. To a catastrophic growth in urban population must be added in the developed countries an equally rapid growth in the number of automobiles men try to stuff into the cities with them. One can only surmise that as income grows in under-developed countries, the same pressures will develop there.

In the developed countries this combination of men and machines is made more lethal by the degree to which their movements are not coordinated. City and suburb together create a situation in which more and more people move in and out at peak periods cutting across both the safety and quiet of residential areas, and across the efforts of traffic to move on a wider regional basis. Nor is anything in this chaotic confusion of function self correcting. On the contrary many of the policies, both public and private, seem at the moment to be making the congestion worse. The large scale building of motor roads to the city precipitates more and more cars in to the center. The centers then either choke as they tend to do in central London and Manhattan. Or else the city center tries to accommodate the cars and disappears in the process—as one can see in Los Angeles where 70% of the city center is given over not to men but to the automobile.

These tendencies to congestion are also increased by construction policies pursued both in the public and the private sector. Two important types of private initiative—the building of offices in the city center, and of single houses in suburbia—increase the density of traffic and also the distances over which it has to travel. The pattern also results in a steady absorption of more and more

land into the urban environment as markets and services follow the suburban dweller outwards. Dense rings of concentric building surround the central city and add both to the confusion of traffic movement and to the inability of city dwellers to get away to anything else.

Nor does public policy contradict the trend. It tends to concentrate its vast administrative and other activities in big metropolitan areas and also to construct low density housing in scattered estates on the fringes of cities. Thus it accentuates the «sucking pull» of the economic and social forces connected with modern urban life and increases the range of suburban «scatter».

In the developing countries the contradictions are, if anything, worse. Few of them, it is true, have as many big centers of megalopolitan growth. But those that exist are caught in more radical contradictions. Most of these contradictions are inherited from the colonial period. During that time, vast cities—almost always sea ports—grew up to serve the import/export sector and co-existed with an almost completely unmodernized hinterland. Since the last war, these cities are tending everywhere to become the targets of a vast movement of people out of the country-side—a movement which is not related to opening for employment in the cities but rather expresses disgust at the misery of rural life.

There are, of course, some traces of this movement in the developed world as well. They can be seen, for instance, in the movement of the Negro from the American South into the big Northern cities. But, in general, the openings for employment which Jamaicans and Algerians cross the sea to find do in fact exist. This is not so in the developing world. There the contradiction of people moving into urban areas before industrialization has taken hold and moving out of agricul-

* Chairman: Lyle Fitch



Fourth Meeting at Siphnos, July 17, 1964. Subject: The Political Implications of the Science of Ekistics. Chairman: Lyle C. Fitch (back to camera, on right)

ture before productivity on the farm is developed enough to feed the urban multitudes is becoming one of the most serious elements of economic, social and political imbalance in the under-developed countries.

THE SEARCH FOR CONCEPTS

Have any ideas emerged for dealing with these causes of urban crisis—causes which one can hopefully say do seem to be more and more widely understood? In a short discussion one cannot do more than pick out two or three. But perhaps three ideas, one static and two dynamic, are widely enough discussed in the popular dialogue to merit attention.

To the old idea of the «neighborhood», as a place which is stable enough and safe enough for the proper nurture and education of children, has been added another idea which links the neighborhood with the growing problem of city movement. Professor Buchanan asks the man in the street to reflect on what he expects from a home and to ask himself whether he wants streams of people going through the bedroom or expects to drive his car into the garage through the living room. The concept of rooms and corridors is perfectly clear inside the house. But it has been lost sight of in the city.

Dangerous traffic goes streaming through residential areas and people go shopping or take children to school often at peril of their lives. But the traffic is not much better served since the «corridors» are congested and insufficient. The

Buchanan Report is an attempt to work out for a number of cities (and indeed parts of cities) the implications of attempting to restore neighborhoods—or «rooms»—in which life can be lived on a human scale while at the same time constructing means of communication with other neighborhoods, with other city functions and with the world beyond the city in an unimpeded and acceptable way. The sorting out that he proposes involves access on foot to schools, shops, recreation areas and community services. Then intermediate roads serve inter-city traffic. Finally, a big arterial system of highways links the city with the region.

But at this point, clearly, the neighborhood as a static concept has to be fitted into an essentially dynamic situation. Present forms of dynamism simply result, as we have seen, in more and more congestion and confusion. But dynamism itself cannot be checked. Other alternatives have to be found and one or two seem to have appeared over the horizon of discussion.

The first is the idea of the «Linear City» in which growth would be permitted and encouraged in one or two directions. Excessive movement to and from the city center would be controlled by constructing a series of centres along the line of growth. Access to the non-urban world would be possible as a result of lateral communication.

Another concept might loosely be called that of «the magnetic field». Here the over-growth of one city is checked by complementary growth in other centers in the region. Proper control of land use and, where necessary, a certain amount of devolution of functions counters the risk of all the various centers joining up. Thus access to surrounding land and reasonably free movement of traffic are assured. Naturally, there must be an almost infinite variety of ways of working out types and models of the linear city and of the magnetic urban field. Both, however, have some implications which cannot be avoided.

The first is clearly, that the concept of purposive planning with its corollary control of land use, has to be accepted.

The second is that it is impossible to work out any coherent version of these principles of control if economic and social forces press too heavily *against* the ideas involved in the plan. An «urban» area has to be chosen which is large enough to include most of the normal pressures operating on the city. Otherwise it will be hard to canalize these pressures into the channels of a satisfactory urban pattern.

The scale of territory over which this kind of control has to be exercised will vary from community to community. But the pressures are never contained within a single city. Dynamism entails a wider view. The plans will be *regional* plans and will have to be based upon a full knowledge of the inescapable pressures—of resources, of lines of

communication, of existing urban centres and markets and so forth—which will underpin or disrupt the urban pattern. Otherwise there can be no guarantee that apparently reasonable plans will not simply blow up in the planner's face. In fact, it may well be that the first decision in effective urban planning is to establish the regional area which has to be its setting. This fact only underlines the need to pass beyond the idea of «town planning» and to adopt instead the ecological or environmental concept of the science of human settlements.

OBSTACLES TO PLANNING

In a short paper, there is no space for a long detailed discussion of all the obstacles to planning. Here, a few points are picked out to provide a framework for discussion.

- a. The first obstacle is cost. We do not know too much yet about the costs of redeveloping whole regions in a way that permits modern men to live with some comfort and confidence. No estimates exist either of the cost of doing nothing about urban congestion. But if we take the Buchanan figures, the cost of redesigning quite a small country town like Newbury so that the citizen can both use his car and not abuse the city is in the neighborhood of 90 million pounds (sterling). In a fully industrialized city like Leeds the cost of replanning roads to introduce the «room-corridor» approach would be over 250 million pounds (sterling). These clearly are formidable sums and can no doubt be matched by figures from other fully industrialized countries. And they only cover the redesigning of the «corridors».
- b. A second obstacle in Western countries lies in the number of very strong interests at stake in the present *unplanned* type of city growth. The enormous profits to be made from selling agricultural land for development on the fringes of cities encourages the outward creep of the conurbations—just as office building in the center has added to internal congestion. To regulate these interests without unduly checking dynamic private growth or annoying too many often quite small private interests has taxed Western policy for the last 50 years. In some countries, the problem is intensified by a resolute opposition to all forms of planning as an impediment to independent economic activity.
- c. Another range of difficulties lies in the problem of working out the structures and administration which alone can make regional planning a manageable exercise. If there is to be a regional plan for New York, for

instance, between 4 and 5,000 separate authorities compete for jurisdiction in the required area. Many of them have strong vested interests in their own authority and particularly in their ability to construct defences against the wider community of which they are nonetheless a part. It is perhaps significant that the reaction of the British Government to the Buchanan Report has been to announce that it is a splendid report and that nothing will be done about it. The Steering Committee of the Report called for the introduction of regional traffic authorities. The point has not been taken up and it is widely believed that neither party is anxious to rouse local Government opposition in an election year.

- d. This point brings one directly to the relative indifference of public opinion everywhere to the possibilities of positive planning in urbanisation. Housing is a tremendous issue but it tends nowhere to be linked with the environmental decisions which would place it in a decent urban setting. This relative indifference to urban problems is reinforced by a considerable lack of interest in local politics. In some areas the mood is even more negative and reflects a certain contempt for the people engaged in politics at the city level. Public opinion, therefore, is uninterested in the first place and then tends to be disgusted when corrupt or incompetent officials make the pattern of city politics even more unattractive.

POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FUTURE

- a. In the developed world, cost need not be a total obstacle. If, over the next decade arms expenditure remains stabilized, while the techniques of «demand management» underpin a steady period of growth of 4 to 5 per cent a year, it is arguable that large scale urban renewal and a far more ambitious approach to the problems of human settlements can become a central stimulus to expansion on the side of government. Few activities can promote so wide a variety of domestic industries and services. Few are so well designed for the cooperation of public and private enterprise. Few, indeed, have such a chance of becoming to a considerable degree self-financing. Moreover, the cost of doing nothing grows all the time. An increasing diversion of resources to the cities may in fact seem to be far less costly than the present picture suggests, particularly if better estimates are made of the enormously heavy costs of allowing the present drift to continue.

However, this is not true of the developing world where lack of resources and difficult choices between competing necessities still dominate the planning process. As a guide to these choices, economic theory so far has given an unduly low priority to urban development. Insufficient attention seems to have been paid to the stimulus urban programs can give to indigenous industry, particularly if special care is taken to use local materials. Houses have been weighed against factories and found wanting. The result today is that all over the developing world communities face the steadily rising economic and social costs of shanty towns and *bidonvilles* and *favellas*. Public order disintegrates and the urban mob becomes a factor in retarding further development. Moreover, the imbalance tends to grow since the lack of housing policies in the countryside and in small towns accelerates the flight to the city.

The field of urbanization could, however, be made the focus of new policies in economic assistance. At present perhaps the greatest obstacle to dynamic growth is the relative breakdown of the market circuit between stagnant countryside and overcrowded cities. If foreign aid could be used to stimulate the growth of regional centres as markets and «poles of attraction» where processing industries were encouraged; modernization would spread to rural areas, goods would be available to tempt the farmers to greater productivity, local food would be available for the cities and the drift to the megalopolitan areas could even be slackened. The evolution of a regional plan of the «magnetic field» variety could thus be a large factor in creating a dynamic market as the basis of economic growth. And in developing lands the various advantages already noted in developed communities—stimulus to a wide range of activities, relatively straightforward cooperation between public and private enterprise, the possibility of self-financing—are all equally evident.

- b. It can be argued that one of the reasons for the resistance to the idea of planning in Western societies springs from the fact that it has been so largely negative. «You must not put your factories here, you must not sell your land to that shopping center, you must not go out of the zones we have laid down». But the kind of planning entailed in any larger pattern of urbanization would surely be of a positive kind in which areas of development were opened up and incentives offered to ensure that the right forces

moved into the right place. Planning on a regional basis implies a clear picture of the social and economic advantages that are envisaged. If it is exciting enough and offers enough inducements to change, it will be seen not as a restrictive instrument but as an effort to liberate a wide range of economic and social energies.

Moreover, experience of quite limited urban renewal so far suggests that new interests come into play when firms and industries begin to see the value of the new approach. Admittedly any plan will include its prohibitions as well as its incentives, but it should be possible to create an effective lobby of interests in support of the Plan which is greater and more articulate than the interests that have to be overridden.

- c. This point brings us to the problem of political organization and pressure. It is probably very nearly impossible to interest people in concepts of regional planning and government unless at least two concrete strategies are adopted to bring both public opinion and also new types of public control and administration into proper focus. The first strategy is the identifying of problems to be solved so that the needed steps are seen as logical means to desirable ends. Traffic control, urban renewal can be examples of new needs leading to new solutions and institutions.

The second strategy lies in the attempt to give people a concrete image of what the region will look like. The publication and dissemination of the plans requires, of course, immediate steps to control speculation in land in every area where large-scale new development is to occur. But without a positive picture of a region's potential «new look», there is no focus for public education and public support.

However, one should not despise the negative emotions. Increasingly, citizens are frustrated by congestion and discomfort. They sense the stifling of community values. They begin to notice the steady retreat of open land and recreation areas, the increasing difficulty of access to non-urban life. Above all, in some areas, the degree to which urban slums are seen as a basic threat to civic order is beginning to rouse a new interest in creative urbanism. In the United States, in particular, where civil rights, the war on poverty and the neglected city all come together in a single, concentrated social challenge, the chance to rouse public opinion over the issues of urbanism is probably better than ever be-

fore. In many of the developing countries, the same pressures are at work.

But there are positive and concrete images to evoke. So far not much thought seems to have been given to the way by which a vision of a more beautiful and commodious city can be conveyed to public

opinion and thus support both for the plan and for the regional structures of government which any workable plan pre-supposes. This is one of the great new fields of public education and one which—as we watch the horrifying process of Boston join Washington—cannot be undertaken quickly.

2. PLANNING AND POLITICS

Edmund N. Bacon

We have agreed that chaotic and uncontrolled extension of human settlements is one of the most serious threats facing our civilization. If allowed to continue as it has been going, it may undermine the very foundation of our social structure. We have agreed that this threat can be met only by the establishment of some ordering principle for the extension of human settlements of a scale commensurate with the scope of the problem.

Order at this scale of magnitude is not self-generating. It does not and cannot automatically rise out of the multiplicity of separate decisions and actions which now shape the form of the region. Therefore, we should examine from whence this order is to come.

It is usual to blame the lack of order on the politicians or on the political processes. This is a comforting thought for the intellectual, and, on a massive scale, is used as an excuse for disassociating the intellectual from the processes of government.

The failure of cities is an intellectual's failure. It is a failure to define the issues in terms that can be acted upon by the political processes. It is a failure to grasp the evolving settlements as functional and organic entities, a failure to see them as a living whole, a failure to conceive what they should become.

Only after there has been developed an intellectual concept of a total order at the scale of the evolving modern day settlement can the process of government swing into action and respond to it. Only after explicit images have been created, have been concretized, and have been widely disseminated, a valid process of communication having taken place, can the flow of ideas on the scale of the problem take place, can interaction and feedback occur, the concept being influenced by the political processes and by the public reaction, and the public reaction and political processes be influenced by the idea, and so a total process set into motion. Here there is involved faith that such an interaction will produce a total order, but without a total intellectual concept the issue is not even posed.

Defining the issues requires bringing into relationship the total range of elements involved

in the problem and the setting forth of explicit images of solutions with that degree of clarity necessary to communicate their essential nature to the minds and hearts of the people involved in political decisions. To be effective it must be a total, unbroken flow from the broadest analysis of social and economic forces to the most explicit planning of specific physical, social and governmental solutions, each part being interrelated to each other part and to the whole. To set such a conceptual flow into motion places a strain on the intellectual resources of our society which it is ill-equipped to meet. Our social system and our educational institutions do not produce minds geared to cope with an intellectual process of this scale and magnitude.

The fundamental requirement is to train men or groups of men with the capacity to understand at this scale, to dare to create hypotheses of order at this scale, and with the courage to plunge into the processes of public discussion with the purpose of seeing this concept of order become alive. It has repeatedly been shown that a clear, inclusive image can generate political action on a vast scale. The first requirement is to create such an image on the true scale of our current dynamic age.

The lessons of history indicate that, when such a course is followed, the possibilities of public action are vast indeed.

In order to be effective in the field of political action, a planning concept must have certain qualities. As a basis for discussion, I have listed below those equalities which I consider to be essential:

- a. It must have a clear structure, which, I think, will be based primarily on a lucidly defined and organically complete movement system. The system must relate powerfully and efficiently with the environment within which the city exists. This includes both the physical topography of the immediate area and the regional forces which impinge on the area, and connect it with its hinterland, and ultimately with the rest of the world. It also includes the psychological and aesthetical environment, taking into