

THE TOWN PLANNING CONFERENCE (LONDON, 1910): INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGES IN THE BEGINNING OF THE MODERN URBANISM.

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ABSTRACT

The Town Planning Conference, held in London in October 1910, is considered the first international meeting congregating the most impressive urban planners of the world, coming from Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, United States and also from Brazil.

The leitmotiv was the recent and heated debate of a global normative applied for all the urban areas in Britain (improvements, town extension, housing, urban aesthetics) named Housing and Town Planning Act, approved in 1909. This paper aims to analyse the contribution of this Conference (speech, debates) to the diffusion of urban ideas in the international town planning scenery, with some references affecting Brazil.

THE INTERNATIONAL DIFFUSION OF URBANISM AND THE RELEVANCE OF CONGRESSES AND EXHIBITIONS

International Congresses and Exhibitions on Urbanism were the most important events to spread the new set of ideas about the understanding of and intervention in the cities, which was a disciplinary field in formation up to that moment. Initially, the first forums took place in association with another type of event of greater magnitude: the Universal Exhibitions, which were the major expression of the globalization in the second half of the 19th century. Characterized by a restrictive and thematic nature, said forums took place together with the Exposition Universelle de Paris in 1889, and subsequently associated with the Chicago World's Fair in 1893 (which relied on the participation of the American Institute of Civil Engineers), and the Expositions Universelles of Brussels and Paris, in 1898 and 1900 (which counted on the first Congrès D'Art Public), until it reached maturity and independent expression, such as the Exhibition on Urbanism that took place in Dresden, in 1903 (Erste Stadtebauausstellung zu Dresden).

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During the first decade of the 20th century, said congresses were the most important forums that made possible the discussion of ideas entertained by the community of town planners, comprised at that time of municipal administrators, engineers and architects. The magazines, guidebooks and books on the subject were still incipient.

After the event of 1903, other significant meetings were the Town Planning Conference held in 1910, followed, three years later, by the Premier Congrès International et Exposition Comparée des Villes.

All these meetings relied on the sporadic participation of some Brazilian personalities, such as Saturnino de Brito, Afrânio Peixono, Arthur Motta and Victor da Silva Freire.

The latter, one of the most assiduous participants in said forums, surely attended the most important meetings held in 1910 and 1913. Freire, who was the director of Municipal Works Department in São Paulo throughout a long period (1899-1926) and senior professor at Escola Politécnica, was the main responsible for the transference of said international set of ideas to Brazil just before the First World War.

THE TOWN PLANNING CONFERENCE - 1910

The year of 1910 is considered by historiography as a decisive year for the internationalization of urbanism (COLLINS, 2005, 44). In addition to the German exhibitions and congresses mentioned above, the National Conference of City Planning (May, New York), the Internationalen Wohnungenkongress (June, Vienna), and the Town Planning Conference, organized by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) held in October in London were quite important. The latter, due to its significance and magnitude, may be considered as the most relevant of them, which relied on illustrious town planners of that time, who represented Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Italy and United States.

The Town Planning Conference (TPC) lasted for six days and counted on 1,250 participants (SUTCLIFFE, 1981, 171), a number that can be considered significant for an event that addressed a new subject. In addition, there was not even a specific profession related to the field, the town planner and, consequently, there were no associations or entities bound to said profession. The courses on town planning offered by higher education schools were taking form, such as the Annual Seminar Berlin-Charlottenburg (which began in 1908) and the important course on Civic Design offered by University of Liverpool, which cathedra was established in 1909.

In this sense, it is possible to indicate some strategic goals intended with the organization of an event of the size of a Town Planning Conference:

- to become part of the process that spread and deepened the knowledge of town planning experienced by the English people, reinforced by the

- presence of the first cathedra of Civic Design, in addition to the first English magazine about town planning, the *Town Planning Review*;
- to discuss and spread the Housing and Town Planning Act¹, the most important English town planning regulation approved in the previous year.

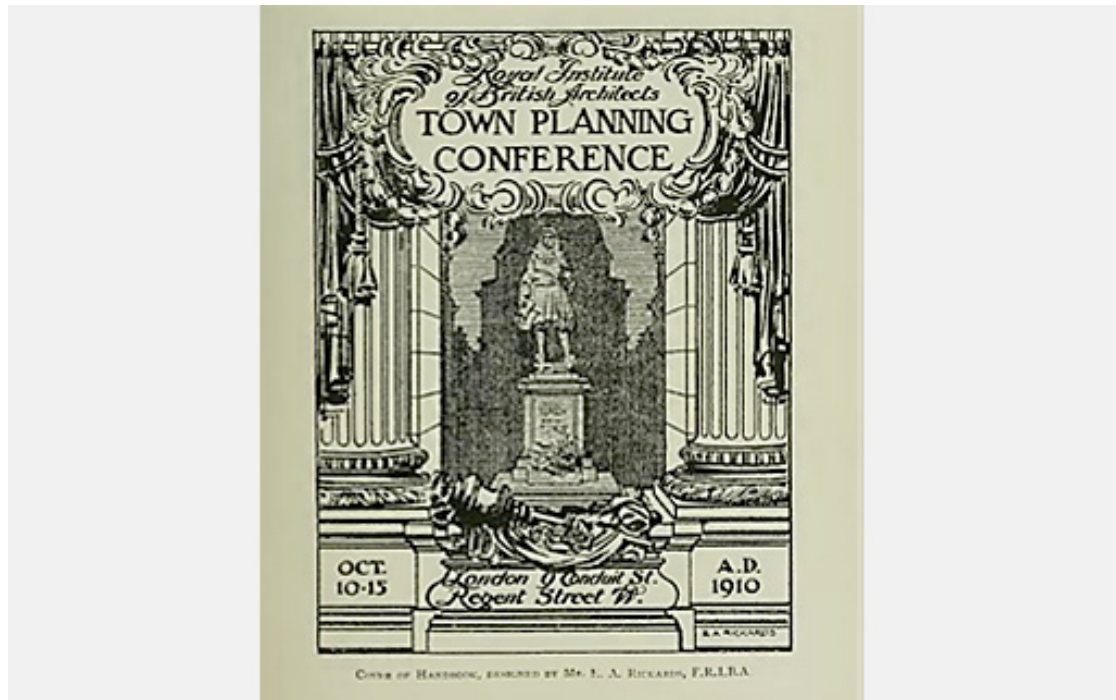


Fig. 1 - Cover of Handbook, RIBA, designed by the member Edwin Alfred Rickards, honoring the figure of sir Christopher Wren, one of the greatest British architects, author of the project of São Paulo's Cathedral, in London, in 1696. (TOWN, 1911, 5)

The main exponent of the Executive Committee of the Conference was the town planner Raymond Unwin, who had participated in the exhibition of Berlin and was quite impressed with the impact of the event. He was responsible for organizing the TPC and he also participated as representative of the Garden Cities Association.

Unwin held a quite critical view of the solutions that were being adopted to solve the dwelling problem of the English working class and he was an active

¹ Said norm aimed to regulate the expansion plans and the urban aesthetics and particularly to improve the conditions of housing projects for the working class, prohibiting the construction of the block standard where the semi-detached houses with back-to-back lots were predominant. Said standard, resulting from the regulation after the *Dwelling Act* of 1875, attributed to the private entrepreneur or to local governments the duty to produce social dwelling for the market, and this led to a model of block division aiming higher profit (long rows of semi-detached houses, known as *back-to-back* or *by-law grid*) – fact that became symbol of urban poverty of English industrial cities, with severe social, environmental and aesthetic consequences.

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defender of housing projects that incorporated the low density of occupation, alleging that the social gains would surpass the economic losses resulting from the less intense use of the soil. Since 1903, he was involved in the construction of the first British garden-city together with Ebenezer Howard, creating and implementing the projects of Letchworth and Hampstead. In the following year, he published a work that reached great repercussion, *Town Planning in Practice*, in which he presented said set of ideas and the projects associated to it.

In addition to Unwin, the event was supported by Howard himself (at that time, he was the most notorious personality of the English town planning, founder of the Garden-Cities Association and author of the classic book *To-morrow: a Peaceful Path to Real Reform* in 1898), and by the town planner Thomas Coglan Horsfall. Horsfall was also one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the Housing and Town Planning Act and his contribution to this debate took place with the publication of the relevant work *The Improvement of the Dwellings and Surroundings of People* in 1905. In this book, he praised the German town planning in the solution of the problem of social housing and control of urban expansion zones, defending its applicability in the British territory. The Honorary President of the event, the controversial John Burns, was also a political articulator in favour of the approval of the Town Planning Act. Therefore, the ideological orientation of the event was quite clear, through the view that these three relevant British town planners had of the urban order to be established.

VISITS AND TRIPS

It is interesting to observe that, of all the 18 visits scheduled, the ones made to the first two garden-cities, Letchworth and Hampstead, awoke the interest of all, and each visit counted on more than 200 participants, whereas in other visits (Bourneville, Port Sunlight, Oxford and so on), the number was quite smaller, rarely exceeding 40 participants. Thus, the goal to promote the new set of ideas related to town planning by means of the event had been fully reached.

THE EXHIBITION

The Town Planning Exhibition was organized in several galleries, each one showing the works of some countries. Therefore, the Gallery 1 presented the works of Italy and England, emphasizing some plans developed for Rome, Milan and Genoa. The Gallery 2 displayed the works of England and the British colonies, emphasizing projects in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Sudan and in London. The Gallery 2A - the English garden-cities and suburbs - displayed photographs and watercolour paintings of other enterprises in addition to Letchworth and Hampstead, such as Port Sunlight, Bournville and Earling, attracting the interest of the participants. The Gallery 2B displayed the Civic Survey of Edinburgh,

presenting the urban research conducted by professor Patrick Geddes and his Outlook Tower, which subject would be detailed in the lecture he would deliver in the Congress. The Gallery 3 - the United States, displayed particularly the splendid drawings of the project of Chicago and Washington, brought by Daniel Burnham. The Galleries 4 and 5 presented works from Holland, Belgic, Scandinavia and Austria, emphasizing plans developed for Amsterdam, Hague, Louvain, Stockholm, Copenhagen, Vienna, Budapest and Manila. The Galleries 6 to 11 displayed works from Germany and France. Germany was the most organized country, which contributed with the greatest amount of material, particularly because Werner Hegemann sent to London great part of the material he had presented in the event he organized in Berlin and Dusseldorf some months before. The plans developed for Berlin, presented in great detail, were the subject of the lecture delivered by professor Eberstadt, and caused great impact. France sent little material, emphasizing solely the projects created by Eugene Hénart for Paris and his proposals for the city of the future. Adshead, in article published in the magazine Town Planning Review, praised the initiative of the exhibition, considered infinitely better than the German Ausstellung (ADSHEAD, 1910, 180).

THE CONGRESS, THE TOWN PLANNERS AND THEIR SET OF IDEAS

The works presented in this Conference were organized in seven thematic sections, which comprehended the following topics: 1 - Cities of the past; 2 - Cities of the present; 3 - City development and extension; 4 - Cities of the future; 5 - Architectural considerations in town planning; 6 - Special studies in town plans; 7 - Legislative conditions and legal studies.

Among the 43 papers presented and discussed, it is important to emphasize the presence of the 16 main international town planners. Therefore, it is possible to affirm that the Town Planning Conference was the event that best allowed the propagation of the set of ideas related to town planning among the European and American countries before 1914.

The town planners were:

- from Great Britain: Ebenezer Howard, Raymond Unwin, Patrick Geddes, A.D. Adshead, Thomas Mawson, Thomas Adams, Thomas Coglan Horsfall.
- from Germany: Joseph Stübben, Rudolf Eberstadt, Werner Hegemann, A.E. Brinckmann.
- from France: Eugene Hénart, Augustin Rey, Louis Bonnier.
- from United States: Daniel H. Burnham, Charles Mulford Robinson.

To understand and evaluate the actual impact of this congress, it's relevant to present some facts and ideas related to the main town planners who actively participated in the event. In this sense, the main content of each exposition will be supplemented by other sources of information, like biographical data and professional facts, associated with the engagement of each urbanist in the international exchanges process.

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PATRICK GEDDES - Considered the most prominent figure of the event (SUTCLIFFE, 1981, 175), Geddes represented the Sociological Society. He was a professor at the University Hall of Edinburgh, an evolutionist and defender of the social research methodology for urban diagnostics. He idealized an urban research centre located in the Outlook Tower, in order to allow a view of Edinburgh and its spreading throughout the region. This configuration would enable the expansion of said view for a world scale. The precious research material organized by Geddes was the largest collection about town planning existing in the United Kingdom at that time and it was fully used in the Exhibition of RIBA, organized by Geddes himself and attached to the TPC. In his conference, The Civic Survey of Edinburgh, Geddes presented the results of a social and urban research on that city, which would be published in this same year as a book. In the Survey, it is possible to find several data of the city, such as historical, geographical and registration information, maps, photographs, statistical data obtained from Inquiries, which were part of an exhibition held in Edinburgh. The Survey became an instrument for the civic design (or town planning), reaching far beyond the material process and suggesting an ideal development. At the end, he recommends the application of the Survey in other cities, such as Paris. In the year following the TPC, Geddes organized the Cities and Town Planning Exhibition in Edinburgh in order to promote his set of ideas and collection.

STANLEY DAVENPORT ADSHEAD - Member of the Executive Committee of the TPC, Adshead was the main professor of the Department of Civil Design at Liverpool School of Architecture, and he presented the text City Improvement. In his speech, Adshead points to the advantages of the recent international interchange of data related to urbanism by means of congresses and exhibitions. Making a comparative analysis, he considered that England was far behind Germany, France and United States, particularly in relation to the aspects of aesthetics and scale of interventions. In this sense, he recommends particularly to the English people to expand their town planning references considering the international experience, adopting a cosmopolitan approach, incorporating new paradigms without the need to destroy positive aspects of its urban architecture and culture.

THOMAS MAWSON - A professor of Landscape Architecture of the Department of Civic Design at Liverpool, Mawson presented the essay Public Parks and Gardens: their design and equipment. In the lecture, he defends the creation of urban park systems, which could be established in form of radial or green belts around the city. He makes reference to positive examples observed in Vienna, Boston and Chicago, where he exalts the aesthetic wonders produced by the White City, at the Columbian World's Fair Exposition held in 1893. Mawson also analysed other cases of urban parks located in Dunfermline, Cambridge and Southport. They are case studies that comprise the last chapter of his book, which would be published soon after the TPC with the name Civic Art - Studies in Town Planning, Parks, Boulevards and Open Spaces.

JOSEPH STÜBBEN - In 1910, he was considered the most experienced town planner of the world, who created several urban plans for many German towns

(the most notorious was the plan developed for Cologne in 1881), and wrote the most known urbanism guidebook up to that moment (*Der Städtebau*, in 1890). He took part in the International Congress of Architects organized by RIBA in London in 1906, and initiated the discussion on urban matters in the events of said entity. In 1910, he was invited to the TPC because he also represented the *Verband deutscher Architekten-und-Ingenieure Vereine*, the central entity of architects and engineers of Germany.

When Stübgen presented some aspects of the development of the German town planning in his conference, he emphasized that until the decade of 1880, the rectilinear alignment was predominant in the German street projects, particularly as a result of the strong influence of Paris, considered up to that moment as the “great master” by all German planners. However, in the decade of 1890, probably as a result of the strong references of Camillo Sitte, the curved layout became more valued. The medieval German cities became object of study, particularly the good solutions adopted for squares and street layout. Therefore, there was a tendency to combine these two positions. The examples with good solutions observed in German cities, where the treatment of the curvature is valued by means of the implementation of outstanding elements across its outline (churches, squares, enlargement of road axis, and so forth), such as the projects for urban expansion areas and some German garden-cities, were also focused in the presentation.

RUDOLF EBERSTADT - Economist and professor of the University of Berlin, Eberstadt dedicated his efforts to deal with matters related to dwelling, municipal finances and urban land policy. His most relevant work about this theme was published in 1909 under the name *Handbuch des Wohnungswesens und der Wohnungsfrage*, where he discusses aspects concerning dwelling and land policy, dwelling financing, taxes and aspects of the municipal management. The book reached international repercussion, and it was widely used by the Brazilian town planner Francisco Prestes Maia in the preparation of his *Plan of Avenues for São Paulo*, in 1930. Eberstadt took part in the *Urbanism Seminars of Berlin - Charlottenburg*, organized by Brix and Genzmer and, in 1910, he applies for the context for the development of the *Plan of Great Berlin (Gross-Berlin Wettbewerbe)*, together with the town planners Bruno Möhring and Richard Petersen, and he won second place.

In his lecture about the *Plan of Great Berlin* at the TPC, Eberstadt emphasizes the relevant role of the process of international diffusion of urbanism, where each nation may learn with the experiences of the other and, at the same time, they can increase the global knowledge of the matter. He also emphasizes several trips to Germany made by English technicians so they could understand the solutions found for the social dwelling issue, the urban expansion areas, the regulation of alignments, and so forth. He presents images of the projects of Herman Jensen for Berlin emphasizing five relevant aspects: the overcrowding in the central areas, the definition of a fast transportation system integrating the centre with the more peripheral zones, the proper distribution of parks and open spaces throughout the urban area, the artistic development and the planning of monumental public buildings and, most important, the planning of the subdivision of the urban expansion areas, particularly the creation of social dwellings. He also stresses that Germany never met the existence of the terrible and magnificent horizontal housing developments, the English or Belgium tenements, because there they found a different solution: the

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cottages, and the little tenement-houses. In the end, he also mentions some aspects of his book, which had been recently published, emphasizing the urgent review of positions adopted by the private segment in the urban land market, where the principle of the social gain must prevail over the profit.

WERNER HEGEMANN - The most eclectic of the town planners present, Hegemann graduated from universities in Berlin, Munich, Paris and Harvard. He was the main responsible for promoting the transoceanic migration of the set of ideas related to the German town planning to the United States and South America, by means of congresses he organized in the two continents and the famous book *Civic Art*, published with Elbert Peets in New York, in 1922. He participated in the TPC solely as debater of section, but the material he brought to the exhibition was relevant for the propagation of the German town planning.

EUGÈNE HÉNART - Architect of Mairie de Paris, active participant of international congresses and exhibitions, Hénart participated in the event organized by RIBA in 1906 and the event that was held in Berlin in 1910, in addition to events in the United States. At the time of the TPC, Hénart was considered the most important town planner of France. Later, in 1913, he would be one of the founders and first president of Société Française des Architectes Urbanistes (WOLF, 1968, 50). His main writings were produced between 1904 and 1909 (*Études sur les transformations de Paris*) and published in the first two journals of the area, *Der Städtebau* and *Town Planning Review*. In his theory, he develops analytical and statistical models to study the problems of major cities, among which the famous *Périmètre de Rayonnement* (which was the base for the Plan of Avenues developed in the 1920's by the town planner Prestes Maia for the city of São Paulo, Brazil). In the meeting held in London, Hénart developed studies about the regulation of urban expansion areas for France together with the Musée Social (with other important town planners such as George Benoit Levy, Robert de Souza, Jules Siegfried and George Risler), which later would be approved as the *Loi Cornudet*, in 1919. In his lecture, *Cities of the Future*, Hénart presents a speculative hypothesis about the city of the future, with revolutionary projections, such as plain roofs for buildings, so that they would serve as helidecks (in fact, the helicopter did not exist at that time, but Hénart was able to visualize that a vehicle of such type and size would be widely used as a means of transportation in the future). There are some indications that he would have found inspiration in the then-recent book of H.G. Wells, "*La guerre dans les airs*", published in a French translation in that year. (WOLF, 1968, 93). Another highlight of his lecture was the pioneer vision about the intense use of the automobile for urban transportation, the nefarious effect of soot and dust launched in the atmosphere by buildings (he proposes a vacuum-cleaner and pneumatic pipes cleaning system and the substitution of coal for petroleum for the heating of buildings) and, lastly, the street of the future, with several levels, separating vehicles, pedestrians, collective transportation and infrastructures (built over pilotis, it was a direct reference for ideas developed by Le Corbusier years later). Hénart was convinced that the cities need to be planned for the presence increasingly intense of the airplane. Therefore, he proposes three rings for the city: a central ring, more dense, another intermediary, where

some helidecks would be allowed, and a third peripheral ring, where the airports would be built.

DANIEL BURNHAM - Burnham was considered one of the most important American architects of that time. He projected the first skyscrapers of the world in Chicago. He was the Director of Works of the World's Columbian Exposition (1893), where he built the White City, a model of ideal city, which served as shelter for the exhibition and launched the basis of the American City Beautiful Movement. He also popularized the use of the neoclassic architecture in that country and induced Chicago to an image of "Paris on the Prairie". In 1909, he prepared the Plan of Chicago together with Edward Bennett. Said Plan is considered the first document of the American comprehensive planning, which was displayed in London, causing great impact: "The exhibition of master plans for Chicago and its regions, a prime example of large-scale environmental planning with the use of a Master Plan, filled a large gallery and created a considerable stir". (MELLER, 2004, 175).

In the conference of the TPC, Burnham addresses the importance of the democratic government in the cities, and emphasizes environmental aspects, such as the rational use of water, the use of cleaner fuels to reduce atmospheric pollution and the need to create parks in urban expansion areas. He comments on the positive impact of the Colombian Exhibition of Chicago and, as of this event, the American government decided to launch a contest to create a general plan for the city of Washington. This generated a multiplying effect of such magnitude that, in that year of 1910, hundreds of average and big American cities already had their Plan Commissions in operation.

Of all the works presented in the section The City of the Future, the theme that provoked more discussions was the work of Daniel Burnham. The speech of Hénart also motivated several comments, and it was considered the only one which presented the impact resulting from new technologies, associated with urban innovation. The drawings and projects were praised, but the financial difficulties to build streets over pilotis were pointed out, which would be possibly viable only in the more central areas of high density.

CHARLES MULFORD ROBINSON - Representing the American Conference of Town Planning and the American Institute of Architects, Robinson was one of the most enthusiastic spreaders of urbanism in the United States. Graduated in Arts, he took interest in the urban problems and their analysis, and ended up publishing a relevant work to promote the set of ideas of the City Beautiful Movement in that country. He was one of the first to exercise the profession of town planner in the American territory as a consultant, preparing diagnostics in several cities. The National Conferences of City Planning were the most relevant annual event that took place in the United States, organized as of 1909 by a group of administrators of the city of New York concerned with the solution of severe problems resulting from the urban overcrowding and the population concentration. This first event took place in Washington. In the following year, the second Conference relied on Robinson himself as head of its Executive Commission, which established said forum as one of the most important American town planning event in the first two decades of the last century. Robinson would also be the pioneer in the teaching of urbanism, when he was

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invited in 1913 to undertake the first cathedra of Civic Design in that country, created especially for him by the University of Illinois. (NOLEN, 1916, XVI). The conference of Robinson at the TPC, named Cities of the present as representative of a transition period in urban development - the evidence of standardised streets is an essential text of the book that would be published in the following year, 1911, in the United States, named "The width and arrangements of the streets". In the introduction of this book, Robinson emphasizes that the good receptivity of specialists when he presented his main theses in the meeting of London encouraged him to develop even further the subject and publish it to the public. In fact, the main thesis of the book, as well as the paper presented at the TPC, was the criticism to the practice of standardization of parameters adopted in street projects, pointing to the great costs associated to such practice. This affirmation results from the vast experience of Robinson, who prepared diagnostics in the previous years in more than 30 American cities, in addition to the research within the scope of the post-graduation on urban matters conducted in Harvard.

RAYMOND UNWIN - In the lecture "The city development plan", Unwin discusses some aspects related to the project of urban expansion areas, presenting aesthetic analyses about street layouts and diagonal avenues, resulting from recent thinking, not included in his famous book "Town Planning in Practice", published in the previous year. Short after the TPC, Unwin was invited to undertake a cathedra of a course on Town Planning at University of Birmingham.

EBENEZER HOWARD - In the conference "Town Planning 'ab initio'", Howard points to the advantages of the planned garden-cities and he presents the improvement of some social indicators in favour of his reasoning: for example, the infant mortality in Letchworth is 31 per thousand, whereas in London, it reaches 108 and in Manchester, 134, and in these three cities the proportion of working population is not very different. Therefore, the garden-city is a solution to face many problems of urban agglomerations. He also mentions the cases of Bourneville and Port Sunlight. Finally, he finishes saying: "It is not the nation ready to make an advance upon Letchworth? Surely the time for this has now fully come." (TOWN, 1911, 701).

THE IMPACT OF THE EVENT - INTERNATIONAL INTERCHANGES

The Town Planning Conference may be considered the first major world town planning forum. Important town planners, comprised of sixteen prominent professionals performing in Europe and United States were present. Such as many others, engineers, architects and municipal administrators of Asia, Africa, Australia and South America were responsible for the propagation of said set of ideas and application of urban diagnostic methodologies and principles related to projects for the intervention in major cities.

The interchange of books recently published (Unwin, Mawson, Robinson, Eberstadt), their authors, the first specialized magazines (Der Städtebau, Town Planning Review), the urban projects displayed in the exhibition connected with the TPC, the visits to the pioneer English experiences of social reform (Letchworth, Hampstead, Port Sunlight, Bournville) and the content of the

conferences (particularly the advanced dwelling and urban policy of German cities, the drawings of Burnham for the Plan of Chicago, the methodology of the social survey of Geddes, the futuristic forecasts of Hénart), all said factors caused an intense synergetic effect that contributed to the international propagation of this new urban science, and the consolidation of the town planner profession.

From the establishment of the international set of ideas, the TPC may be considered the turning point, that is to say, the transition from one period subjected to the German town planning, to a new period, where the British town planning would be established, particularly by means of the ideas of garden-cities.

In relation to the flows of said set of ideals to Brazil, the TPC was a decisive event: the most important Brazilian town planner, the engineer Victor da Silva Freire, director of the Municipal Works of São Paulo, was present. In this event, he met Unwin, the German experience and the progresses of the American town planning. Said contacts allowed him to establish alliances and implement, in the following year, a major real estate enterprise associated with the ideas of garden-cities in the city of São Paulo. He also brought a copy of the book by Unwin and promoted it among the engineers of the City Hall, thus contributing to the elaboration of the first law on street construction layout and urban extension, which would be implemented in 1923 in this city. The main successor of Freire, Francisco Prestes Maia, would continue this international transference, valuing Eberstadt, Hénart, Burnham and others, which would be fundamental for the elaboration of the greatest town planning created for São Paulo, the Plan of Avenues. Said Plan marked the structure of the city until the present days.

Due to this reason, it is possible to affirm that the TPC was the most relevant event of this first stage of consolidation of the urbanism, which preceded the First World War, surpassing even the Belgian event that would take place three years later, named Premier Congrès International et Exposition Comparée des Villes.

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