Urbanism Reviewed

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU

urbedtrust.com   September 2020

About the Academy

The Academy of Urbanism is a politically independent, not-for-profit organisation that brings together both the current and next generation of urban leaders, thinkers and practitioners.

We embrace city management and policy making, academic research and teaching, development planning and design, community leadership and urban change-making, arts and cultural development, infrastructure and engineering, property law and management, politics and media.

We work with places to identify and reinforce their strengths, and help them recognise and overcome obstacles to greater success.

Through our events, activities and programmes we draw out and disseminate examples and lessons of good urbanism. We use the evidence we gather to promote better understanding of how the development and management of the urban realm can provide a better quality of living for all.

Our mission is to understand, promote and celebrate what makes great places and to apply these lessons to the improvement of towns and cities across Europe and beyond. We do this by supporting, through access to expertise and knowledge of places, the people and organisations that create and sustain them.

If you would like to help us to recognise, encourage and celebrate great places, and the people and organisations that create and sustain them, we encourage you to become a member of the Academy.

Here & Now is brought to you by The Academy of Urbanism

Past editions of the journal have explored topics ranging from sustainable urbanism, affordable housing, social inclusion, density, culture, health and wellbeing.

This publication is aimed at those who create and manage or are interested in towns and cities, from the viewpoint of architecture, design, urban planning, property development, economics, and more.

Foreword

The Academy of Urbanism's Journal Here and Now provides an outlet for emerging ideas and current best practice in creating and maintaining great cities and places. It enables the Academy to connect with its network of Academicians and Members and a wider audience, demonstrating the relevance of sharing experiences and analysis of places and the people behind them.

Our Journal has grown over the course of a number of years into a publication which reflects the wide diversity of skills within the Academy's network. Through a wide range articles on the elements that make a great town or city, our aim is to produce a publication that is accessible and understandable to any citizen, policymaker, practitioner or politician with an interest in the built environment.

The Journal seeks also to reflect the multi-layered way in which the Academy assesses places – summarised by our founding mantra, Space Place Life – with a broad range of articles, opinion pieces, photo galleries, poetry and illustrations.

The Journal's range and scope has been enriched further by the series of articles written by Dr. Nicholas Falk over a number of years. The nature of Nicholas Falk's background as an economist and researcher has meant that the series has covered different ground to other articles that have featured in our Journal. The series has been intriguing to watch develop over time, focussing very much on what all urbanists can learn from Europe's top cities. Many of the themes addressed in these articles are also addressed in further detail in the publication Good Cities, Better Lives - How Europe Discovered the Lost Art of Urbanism to which Nicholas was a major contributor. In view of the significance of Nick's ten articles the academy has decided to publish them as a compendium which, I am confident, will become a regular future reference for both urbanists and all those with an interest in what contributes to making good urbanism.

A key part of Nicholas Falk's engagement with the Academy has been the leading role he has played in the assessment process of the Urbanism Awards. Nicholas' advocacy of the Urbanism Awards as a vehicle for sharing good practice, particularly at a time when the world seems evermore inward facing, is commendable.

The Awards have been a mainstay for the Academy, and we continue to be enthused by the passion that we encounter on each of our assessment visits from those who dedicate themselves to bettering their places – at whatever scale they are working. This passion has certainly not been lost on Nicholas, and it has been an interesting point to pick up the life and soul that runs through the themes of his articles – from valuing human and social capital to the wellbeing and psychology that underpin the very best places.

Please take some time to read this collection of articles and feel inspired by Dr. Falk's indefatigable approach to promoting what he believes to be the keys to unlocking the future success of our towns and cities.

Tony Reddy
Chair
The Academy of Urbanism

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Introduction

Five years ago I began what turned out to be a series of ten short articles in The Academy of Urbanism journal on the elements of what I call *Smarter Urbanisation*. Academicians are extremely good in selecting, describing and illustrating places that are well worth visiting. I wanted to go further and combine the 'art' of urbanism with what can be measured and compared so that lessons can be drawn and applied with confidence. In *Good Cities Better Lives*, I had helped Sir Peter Hall draw conclusions from a range of European cities on the 'art of urbanism', and the process of development.

What the pieces I wrote for *Here & Now* have in common, apart from their length of around 1500 words plus a few pictures, is that they are based on books and reports that policy makers would find useful, but might not have had the time to read. The reviews may also help in considering places off the usual map, and in taking a more balanced or holistic view of what constitutes success. In this introduction, I have reflected on the main lessons from each of the ten essays that follow, without changing the original titles which thankfully follow a pattern.

1. Size still matters

My first article was on how to assess cities in the light of the Academy's annual awards. Reports for the OECD analysed almost 1200 cities in 29 member countries to conclude that good metropolitan governance is fundamental to success. By combining forces groups of towns and cities can overcome the problems of fragmentation and secure what economists call 'agglomeration economies'. Other rankings are also available that group different indicators together. The keys to success were found to include good public transit and capturing the uplift in land values

from development. Fortuitously the Academy had already picked cities such as Rotterdam and Copenhagen as great European cities, and we needed to go further in finding out how well cities meet the needs of diverse groups, and in looking at how new residential areas were being developed.

2. Great British plans

You cannot assess places objectively without considering values or priorities. Ian Wray, now a visiting Professor at the University of Liverpool, used a series of case studies to show how often plans failed to deliver what they promised, and often made poor choices. I argued for using three basic principles: social justice, natural balance and the minimisation of waste. I had first applied these in my doctoral thesis on the planning and development of London docklands, and suggested they could be used to test how to get better value from major infrastructure projects, such as High Speed Rail or new settlements.

3. Common wealth of private wellbeing?

The publication of a book on Challenging Conventional Policy Wisdom by some eminent economists at the LSE (where I had done my PhD) raised the question of whether planning was trying to achieve too much. While the green belt is a clumsy policy for controlling growth, we needed to find better ways of allocating land for development if only to make housing more affordable. Rather than concentrating on productivity alone, I argued for considering 'common wealth', and the impact of development on property values, which in the UK benefits most that are already well-off. By contrast AoU award winner San Sebastian in Spain's Basque county showed how to combined economic recovery with a much better public

realm and greater equality for all.

4. Smarter urbanisation and valuing local capital

Equality is closely bound up with economic performance. The Centre for Cities has clearly shown that apart from London and a few university towns, most British towns and cities lag far behind their Continental equivalents on factors such as skills, innovation and productivity. In fact British towns and cities are not as dense as other in Northern Europe, due to suburban sprawl, but they are very close together, thanks to the distribution of coal and the industrial revolution. A mammoth study by the European Union probed into life satisfaction, inclusivity and mobility. This showed the importance of access to a good local transport system and green space. The UK stood out as having the lowest local autonomy, falling behind even former Soviet Bloc counties in local public investment relative to GDP, but also with the potential to have a much better local transport system.

5. Making it happen

It is easy to say what is wrong about a place but harder to agree on how to secure improvements so it was refreshing to review some books, such as Hugh Barton's City of Wellbeing that considered the economics of development as well as what creates 'good urban form' from a public health perspective. Another Academician Camilla Ween has shown how to bring about change in difficult circumstances, especially with regard to transport. Charles Landry explored the psychology that makes some cities curious or driven, and hence avoid the British tendency towards arrogance and parochialism. Jane Jacobs is a world-class 'local hero' who has proved what 'amateurs' can achieve in combining theory and practice, and in a collection of short articles concluded that 'city growth patterns in sum are messy.' To help check out that plans are realistic, I suggested learning from leaders in place-making, such as Freiburg and Rotterdam, who combined Ambition, Brokerage and Continuity -an easily remember ABC that any intelligent city could learn from.

6. Smarter urbanisation and capital values

Cities embody the capital accumulated over many generations. The chance to comment on the ideas of capital and competition that underpin economics, and which Thomas Piketty has brought up to date, highlighted the importance of the fourth dimension of time, and not luck, in achieving greatness. One great British invention was the 'garden city', which influenced much 20th century development. David Rudlin and I applied Ebenezer Howard's original Garden City principles, set out as the Social City, to argue for applying ecological thinking to new development. Human and institutional factors are as important as technology in becoming a 'smart city', and what matters are how well different systems are joined up. You do not have to be big to be smarter.

7. Resourcing smarter housing growth

By the winter of 2018, the Academy had assessed enough towns and cities with good housing schemes to draw out a fresh response to the government's Housing White Paper on fixing a broken system. A first article proposed drawing lessons from Germany, the Netherlands, France and Scandinavia on building sustainable urban neighbourhoods, often as extensions on transit lines. Using the images of URBED's triple helix model and proposals for Uxcester Garden City, the article called for spatial growth plans land assembly powers, cheap finance for infrastructure, and frameworks for balanced incremental development.

8. Smarter urbanisation and rapid growth

My second article in the same journal referred to David Rudlin's new book Climax Cities which showed that the cities we like best have not followed masterplans. Instead what matters is some carefully chosen rules. By intensifying land around new or planned railway stations in what is called Transit-Oriented Development or ConnectedCities, we could minimise the environmental impacts of development and encourage healthier life styles. Smarter Urbanisation and Rapid Growth, or SURGe is the name of the URBED Trust's web site for a project to transfer best practice to Southern India.(www.smarterurbanisation.org)

9. Shaping better and healthier cities

Climax Cities uses what the book calls a 'trellis plan', an area of 10 kilometres radius or 4,000 hectares around railway stations, to analyse how well land is being used, using Figure Ground Plans. Other recent books on urban form include a freely downloadable compendium of a hundred cities by Schlomo Angel, which suggested cities that are growing fast should open up kilometre square sites on their edges. I referred instead to the Academy's report on Housing. We made four recommendations to reform strategic planning, raise the standard of design, open up new markets and make housing affordable. Good urban form shoiuld start with connectivity, measure what counts, learn from what works, and I suggested going for fishbones not grids, based on public transport lines.

10. Reinventing town centres.

My final article reflected on a series of good practice guides I have helped produce over twenty five years to consider how town and city centres could ever recover from the crisis brought on the coronavirus epidemic. But in fact centres are continually having to reinvent themselves and fill holes in their urban fabric. I propose four simple steps based on five A's that were used in Vital and Viable Town Centres starting with Action or 'get smart', Access to reopen the streets but with priority for 'active travel'; Attractions to open up empty shops: Amenity to improve special places, and finally and most importantly Agency to re-empower local authorities by enabling them to access finance for investment programmes that would boost recovery in terms of the environment and equity as well as the economy.

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU

URBED triple helix model

Size still matters: how to assess great cities

In searching for the secrets of successful cities, a good place to start is a new report from OECD, Metropolitan Century, on urbanisation and its consequences[1], writes **Nicholas Falk AoU**. The Paris based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has an unparalleled overview of the factors that drive economic success. In a comparative study with the European Union, they have delineated almost 1200 cities across 29 OECD member countries with more than 50,000 inhabitants. Among these are 275 metropolitan areas with more than 500,000 people accounting for half the total population. The metropolitan areas accounted for half of the OECD countries economic growth between 2000 and 2010.

Secrets of success

The report sets out a number of reasons why big is best. These include greater appeal to the most talented young people, higher levels of economic productivity and innovation, and lower environmental costs thanks to better public transport and higher densities of development. Through a powerful series of comparative charts and a voluminous review of the literature, the report stacks up the evidence for focussing efforts on securing 'agglomeration economies', and cutting living costs through measures such as improved public transport and the release of land for development.

However, as always in these comparisons the UK seems to lose out because of an over-concentration of activity in the 'mega city' of London, and an over-centralised political system. As a result the general rule of urban growth (Zipf's Law) which 'predicts that the largest city of a country has twice as many inhabitants as the second largest, three times as many as the third largest, and so on' does not apply to the metropolitan cities of the UK. With a few exceptions such as Bristol, these generally lag behind their European counterparts and their surrounding regions. The reasons may be found in the poor transport systems that lead to workers spending much more time commuting along with the dispersed nature of residential growth, partly a consequence of our treasured Green Belts.

Differences

Though one may criticise the OECD for equating success with both economic performance and population growth, the report does take up the issue of inequality. Polarisation imposes many costs, and the problems are

Manchester is one of the UK's best performing cities in terms of environmental factors

getting worse, with wage inequalities increasing in the very largest cities. However, for those who can afford them, the quality of services, including health, are related to city size, thanks to greater choice and competition. Where the population is dispersed among many authorities, some improvements can be made through bringing them together. Thus the polycentric region of the Ruhrgebiet in Northern Germany actually performs quite well, as do the cities of the Netherlands. Though their cities are not that large, they not only have much better local public transport systems, but also have avoided house price inflation by making land more available on the edges.

It is the urban agglomeration, not the nation, that holds the key to what the future will be like. In some places, such as US cities, the recent trend of young professionals locating in city centres could produce beneficial results, and change the values that have traditionally favoured suburban

living. But in general, as the bulk of urbanisation has taken place, the relatively small size of our cities could hold us back in comparison with growing cities in emerging economies such as China. The report suggests we need to plan so that most people can reach amenities in half an hour, which means favouring mixed developments, in order to create 'liveable metropolises for the 21st century.'

The number of megacities with more than 10 million is expected to grow to more than 40 by 2030, which is radically altering the balance of power in the world. This makes the role of 'city networks' even more vital as cities are 'living organisms' which need to provide higher levels of wellbeing for the most mobile of their residents. London, Paris and Berlin are clearly competing with each other, but so too at provincial level are many other cities which would do better to collaborate and join forces than to dissipate their efforts. Thus it should be possible to see the Northern Powerhouse of

England as an area with all the attractions of the Ruhrgebiet or the Randstad, rather than a collection of warring local authorities.

For those who want to learn, there are plenty of practical implications from the OECD's analyses. Good metropolitan governance, which is covered in a much larger separate report with six comprehensive case studies, can overcome half the problem of fragmentation[2]. There are plenty of proven ways of taming the car, and avoiding urban sprawl, which the OECD report brings out. There are also plenty of ways of financing better transit systems by capturing the uplift in land values and other benefits. But what the report does not do is to show how to overcome the shortsighted and parochial nature of development in the UK, which tends to favour quantity over quality.
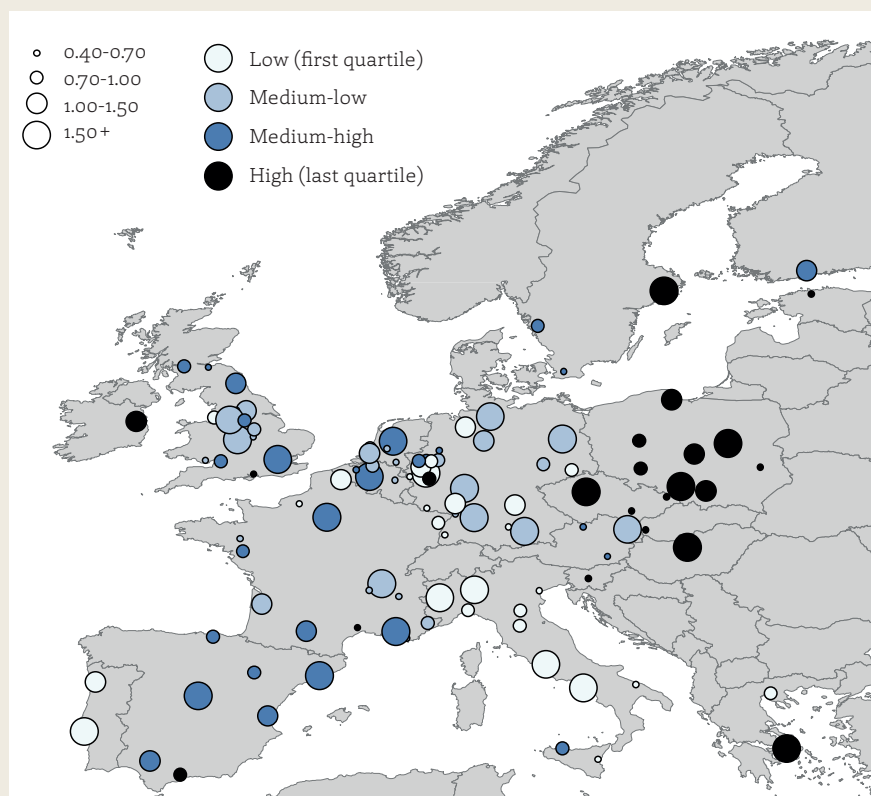
Sustainable Cities

So how can The Academy of Urbanism, with its growing body of case studies, bring about the necessary shift in attitudes? Some clues can be drawn from another valuable report that benchmarks and ranks large cities throughout the world. Produced by the Centre for Economic and Business Research for consultants Arcadis, this very readable and effective report brings together information under three main headings: people, planet

From top right to left:

Frankfurt: leading the way in the 'Planet' category *ph. Barnyz Flickr*

GDP growth per city: Europe (OECD)

∘ 0.40-0.70	○ Low (first quartile)
○ 0.70-1.00	○ Medium-low
○ 1.00-1.50	● Medium-high
○ 1.50 +	● High (last quartile)

and profit[3]. For each theme a medley of statistical indicators is used to rank performance in 50 cities. Of course this has been done before, for example by Monocle and Local Futures, and there are plenty of bodies offering awards for excellent performance apart from the Academy. The problem is that the comparisons rarely compare like with like, and tend to focus on a single aspect, or are over complex. So how do the Arcadis rankings compare with the more subjective assessments made by Academicians.

The first good news is that Rotterdam (*see page 21*) tops the People category, thanks to its property being affordable. Frankfurt and Berlin lead the way in the Planet category, scoring particularly well in waste management. Frankfurt also leads in the Profit category along with London and this is the only category where US cities do as well as European ones. These kinds of measures are vulnerable to criticism as they involve bundling together many different factors. Thus the People category rates transport infrastructure, health, education, income inequality, work-life balance, dependency and green spaces – a real case of what economists refer to as adding apples and oranges. But the general conclusions seem sound, so for example Copenhagen is up in the top five for environmental factors, whereas Birmingham and Manchester come a little behind but far ahead of their American or Asian counterparts.

Drawing conclusions

I have long advocated that the Academy should not only be using some basic indicators in assessing places for awards, so that meaningful comparisons can be made, but should also be drawing conclusions from the places that have won awards. Albert Einstein memorably said *"Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts."* So we need to combine the qualitative with the quantitative to produce a balanced picture. Yet our political leaders continue to concentrate on a very few factors such as GDP per capita or population growth, and neglect the many other factors, such as income inequalities, affordability of housing, or commuting times, that affect most people's sense of wellbeing (*see page 40 Aarhus*).

The value of these massive statistical studies should be in correcting our prejudices such as those that favour High Speed 2 over local transport improvements, and in encouraging a longer-term perspective where we learn from similar places that have made most progress in the factors that concern most people. They also point us to places we may have missed thinking about, such as Frankfurt.

So when we assess places, why do we ask not just whether it is 'exciting' or 'innovative' but how well it meets the needs of different groups (residents, employers, key workers) and the different perspectives of those who are young, old or in-between. Clearly as access to housing and jobs are so crucial, we should be spending much more time looking at how well different places are connected, for example by travelling around on public transport, and less time looking at the quality of the buildings. We might also be focussing on new residential areas, and not just the historic centres, and seeing how well they cater for new households. But this means thinking like an economist – or am I being blinkered?

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU is founder director of URBED, and describes himself an economist, urbanist and strategic planner!

The OECD has also just published its report Governing Cities looking at policy issues. Both reports are available from the OECD Publishing: The Metropolitan Century: http://dx. doi.org/10.1787/9789264228733-en Governing Cities: http://dx.doi. org/10.1787/9789264226500-en

1 Joaquim Martins et al, *The Metropolitan Century: understanding urbanisation and its consequences*, OECD 2015

2 *Governing the City*, OECD 2015

3 *Sustainable Cities Index 2015*, ARCADIS

Great British Plans: and how to avoid future waste

Reflecting off Ian Wray's recent book *Great British Plans*, **Nicholas Falk AoU** argues for a rethink in the way that major infrastructure projects are planned and funded in Britain, and puts forward three fundamental principles against which to judge their success.

Ian Wray's superb historical review of some major British achievements, and the way they were planned, provides an excellent basis for considering how to improve the process. By analysing projects as diverse as the rebuilding of London with great squares instead of grand streets, or Birkenhead Park, which inspired New York's Central Park, along with more recent creations such as the new town of Milton Keynes and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, Wray shows a remarkable similarity in the way we British address grand projects.

A process of 'muddling through' or 'disjointed incrementalism' as the American political scientist Lindblom called it, has been coupled with a reliance on dedicated entrepreneurs to fight against a conservative state that tries to keep public expenditure to the minimum. While this may give Britain some of its endearing character, as we struggle with what to cut next it is time to question the process for planning and funding major infrastructure projects, and to ask: are there better alternatives?

But how do you judge what is success? This was the main theme of my doctoral thesis on Planning London's Docklands, and my first published article called 'How do you judge a city costing £700 million' in an edition of Architectural Design published back in 1974. My arguments that public funds might be better invested in regenerating inner city areas rather than building new towns led to setting up URBED 40 years ago. It also brought me into conflict with many of our leading planners.

It is paradoxical that David Rudlin (my co-director at URBED) and I are now having to make the case for sustainable urban extensions to some of our major cities on the grounds that there is simply not enough brownfield land to cater for housing growth or the funds to build totally new settlements. Apart from whether you favour large or small projects, or private versus public enterprise, we need some fundamental principles to evaluate the case studies that Wray puts forward, and to make better choices than, for example, merely going for High Speed Two because 'every other country has one'!

The simplistic appeal of cost-benefit analysis is clearly not enough. Extraordinarily, many of the biggest projects received little or no evaluation against the alternatives despite the criteria set out in the Treasury's *Green Book*. Multi-criteria analysis is better, but how do you avoid too many objectives, or a situation like the National Policy Planning Framework, which makes it impossible to trade-off sustainable development benefits against the rigid objective of 'protecting the green belts'? Clearly, political considerations will always be paramount, but the job of politicians is to lead opinion, not slavishly follow it.

My thesis argued for three fundamental principles, which are, like those that underpin the American Declaration of Independence, 'self-evident' and therefore cannot be reduced further, (though more weight may be given to one than the other.) The first is Social Justice, a principle advanced by the American philosopher John Rawls, in which it is not acceptable to pursue policies that do not improve the lot of the worst-off. The second is Natural Balance, or which might now be called the Ecological Imperative, which is to leave the planet better off than we found it. The third is the Minimisation of Waste, which argues for keeping both short- and long-term costs down.

Social justice

My objection to the high investment in the New Town of Milton Keynes, regarded by many as a British success story, was that many new residents at the time might have been happier to stay in London if only the same funds had been invested in improving inner city conditions. At the time, opinion research found that many of the residents were miserable – New Town Blues as it became known – having left friends and family behind.

Today's surveys reveal not only a much happier population, the model of a consumerist society, but also a town that has outpaced others in terms of population and economic growth, and also managed to keep housing affordable. Yet the basic car-based plan, which created many small diverse settlements, could have been designed to make mass transit viable if the promoters had thought ahead.

Indeed, as Wray points out, the planners turned their back literally on the original Llewellyn-Davies urban design principles for a vision inspired by the American planner Mel Webber of 'non-place public realm'. Walter Bor, one of the Llewellyn Davies team who drew up the master plan, told me that the road grid was built to ensure there was no turning back.

In building a new generation of settlements, we should be designing them so that everyone can walk or cycle or use public transport, rather than being limited to the few who can afford their own car to get to work or the shops.

Natural balance

My criticism of the outstanding work done by Sustrans in converting disused railway lines into long-distance cycleways is that we might have been better off using rail as the basis for sustainable urban extensions, and making the centre of our towns and cities much more bike friendly. Similarly, the British motorway system has ploughed on without much regard to the more difficult issues of enabling people to make shorter journeys to work without excessive stress.

Our country's unique obsession with strangling our cities with tight green belts has resulted in sterile countryside that scarcely supports any wildlife, and the additional carbon emissions as people spend more time driving to work than in other European country. Interestingly the first British ring road, which like many of Wray's examples, was pioneered in Liverpool as far back as between 1903 and 1923, was part financed by 'a charge levied on developers of new houses fronting onto the road.'

Charging development for the infrastructure has become an unequal struggle between the private and public sectors, in contrast to countries like France or Germany where the government accepts the importance of investing in infrastructure in

advance of development (resulting in much stronger manufacturing and construction sectors). Rather than valuing the 'common wealth' represented by well-used open spaces, we have come to value only what is in private ownership, and cut back local government from being a pioneer of what makes for better lives to acting as a regulator alone.

Wray points out that local government's income from central government rose from 15 per cent in 1913 to 45 per cent in 1973, yet the Layfield Report (and others since) have failed to stop Westminster from becoming ever more autocratic.

Minimisation of Waste

The odd way we plan in Britain might not matter so much if it produced the economies the Treasury seeks, or led to better decisions on important projects. But centralised systems in fact produce worse results than more polycentric ones.

Case studies such as the Channel Tunnel Rail Link show how financial impacts are disregarded for reasons that turn out to be mistaken, whether it be expensive new terminals at Waterloo that then become redundant, or new stations at Stratford where the international trains do not stop. The barren wasteland at Ebbsfleet is a reminder that transport links may be a

necessary condition for development but are rarely a sufficient one. Yet High Speed Two continues to be trumpeted as the saviour of the Midlands or a means of regenerating Euston (which as a local resident I know to be quite unnecessary), while much smaller projects to reopen local stations wither for lack of champions.

In theory, projects and plans are to be evaluated against alternatives, in line with both Treasury and European Union rules.

In practice, the weight of interested parties in any major project, who can effectively control the debate, leads to our poor country going for one bad project after another, as the saga of London's proposed Garden Bridge illustrates. Sir Ivor Crewe and Anthony King provide many more case studies in *The Blunders of our Governments* to suggest the process is endemic.[2]

But as Sir Peter Hall and I showed through case studies of French infrastructure plans, there is a much better way, if only we freed up our cities to resource local investment plans and enabled them to borrow for well-considered investment projects.[3]

Conclusions

Wray hopes we will see the light, yet his book shows for the first time how our approach to planning reflects

our culture, with its tolerance of inequalities and a decaying public realm. However, occasionally, as with securing the Olympic Games, the UK shows it can act together for a greater prize.

So instead of asking what kind of state we want, which gets us tangled in unresolvable ideological issues, we simply need to ask how we are going to get better value from the major infrastructure projects we need to meet our energy, transport, water and waste needs, and to double the rate of house building. Instead of looking to the Chinese or the 'private sector' to fill the gap, we need to bring together the expertise to plan for posterity, not austerity.

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU is founder director of URBED and trained as an economist as well as strategic planner.

1. Ian Wray, Great British Plans: who made them and how they worked, Routledge 2015

2. Ivor Crewe and Anthony King, The Blunders of our Governments, One World Publications, 2013

3. Peter Hall with Nicholas Falk, Good Cities Better Lives: how Europe discovered the lost art of urbanism, Routledge 2014

Milton Keynes
© Keith Williams

Common wealth or private wellbeing?

Every property surveyor learns the adage that there are only three rules in making money in property: 'location, location and location'. But what does the value of a location depend on and how can it be influenced? **Nicholas Falk AoU** reflects on a recently published book, *Challenging Conventional Policy Wisdom*, from the London School of Economics.

Top: Leidschendam Neherpark, Netherlands
© *Vincent van Zeijst*

In an important book on urban policy subtitled *Challenging Conventional Policy Wisdom*, a group of economists at the London School of Economics (LSE) review research findings before arguing for radical changes in the way cities are planned in the UK[1]. Their basic conclusion is that markets work well in sorting people out, which is why those with most money end up in the best locations, so that planning is effectively trying to push water uphill and holding progress back.

Because it is so hard to get hold of land with planning permission in the UK, there are real imperfections that reduce the supply of housing, and lead to unnecessary hardship. The authors draw on studies to dismiss the value of area-based regeneration, at least as far as economic growth is concerned, and conclude that urban policy should focus instead on *'improving skills in declining places, and on investing in infrastructure and housing in more successful places.'* Given that views such as these predominate in the UK treasury, which pulls the strings in government policy, urbanists need to know how to deal with such arguments, including other research on the value of streets and open spaces.

Residential segregation

Economists tend to compare cities in terms of GDP (Gross Domestic Product or Gross Value Added) per capita, but as the areas vary so much between countries such conclusions are often flawed. For example, averages conceal disparities, and major cities generate far more value than peripheral areas. So a better criterion is a city's ability to attract and hold on to population, which is linked to job prospects and wage levels. As 'agglomeration economies', that is the advantages of larger places, are greatest in services and least in manufacturing (other than some specialised sectors), the cities that are centres for consumption with giant shopping malls, educational and health centres, appear to outperform the others, even though they may be unattractive places to live or work in. Hence we need to compare social and environmental as well as economic capital in deciding what makes a great place, and not try to group 'apples and oranges' together.

Britain's 'second tier' of cities appear to be quite small compared with other countries, as a new Centre for Cities report brings out, with a 'date tool' that should make future appraisals much easier[2]. They are also tightly bounded. So instead of growing upwards as compact cities, for many decades the population (and house building) has expanded most in villages and suburbs beyond the boundaries of the cities. The LSE economists put the blame on Britain's failure to grow as fast as other countries squarely on restrictive planning, which has stopped the areas where people most want to live, such as Oxford or York, achieving their full potential.

The book is very helpful in bringing together research conclusions on residential segregation. The differences lie in 'quality of life amenities' such as access to parks and entertainment, and 'productivity amenities' such as better schools or jobs. These differences are reflected or capitalised in house prices

Top: Monpellier
© Berlinrobi via Flickr

Left: Newhall, Harlow

and hence in land values (and interest from developers).

The factors that influence housing choice are fairly universal, at least among countries with Anglo-Saxon customs and attitudes; most people value space, and pay more for it as their incomes rise. So unequal incomes reinforce spatial disparities. But people's welfare is also influenced by the compatibility of their neighbours, and the bigger the city, the more specialised a neighbourhood can be. Differentiation may produce both economic and welfare benefits (but it can also lead to social conflicts). The evidence from the various studies quoted here suggests that causal links between neighbourhood characteristics and life chances are weak or non-existent.

One of the authors, Paul Cheshire, has highlighted the negative effects of greenbelt policy in leading to people having to pay more for less than in other European countries. For example, the price per square metre of housing is 45% less in the Netherlands than

in the UK. High house prices lead to land values inflating, which cause landowners and developers to hang on to land, as the holding costs are low, rather than responding to demand, as economists would like them to do. He points out the absurdities that more land is given over to golf courses in Surrey than to housing, and that large parts of the green belt are given over to industrialised farming, which neither looks beautiful nor is good for nature, but which helps keep house values higher than they should be.

The value of Common Wealth

So how should we respond? Economists tend to value only what can be measured, which tends to miss out urban quality or wellbeing. So-called 'public goods' such as parks or transport facilities have benefits that are hard to capture through charges. Spatial disparities may be the price we pay for living in a liberal economy. Interestingly while 'area effects' account for only 30% of the difference between city performances in the UK they account for 50% in France,

possibly because we are a much more unequal country.

As inequalities within cities are so important in the UK, what can be done to reduce them? Research into well-funded policies such as the New Deal for Communities suggests the answer is very little. Where people's life chances are improved, for example by acquiring the skills to get a job, they often move to be replaced by someone less skilled. Also wealthier people much prefer to be surrounded by others like them, and resist proposals for mixing tenures. So housing policy is crucial.

Private wealth, as Thomas Piketty showed in his influential book *Capital*, is largely bound up with housing, where governments have seemed powerless to tackle inequalities[3]. But urbanists should also consider **common wealth**, which governments can shape through planning and public expenditure. The term can be used to cover environmental resources, as the great economist Jeffrey Sachs does in his superb book *Economics for a Crowded Planet*[4]. But it also can cover public

San Sebastián

goods in general. Social entrepreneur Martin Large uses the term much more widely in another book with that title[5]. He offers six solutions to the 'loss of the commons':

- Building a sustainable local economy, vibrant culture and community;
- Transforming capitalism for public good and for individual enterprise;
- Securing permanently affordable homes for all through community land trusts;
- Enabling social inclusion and individual initiative through the Citizen's Income;
- Freeing education from bureaucracy and children from commercialism;
- Leading and learning from the social future as it emerges.

Can we put a financial value on public goods, such as access to open space? Any appraisal of Common Wealth should include the features we most love in our cities, such as the grand squares that serve as landmarks, the galleries and other civic buildings, and the bars and shops that generate vitality. The tree-lined streets of suburbia, as well as the many parks and smaller open spaces should also be counted, and perhaps even our inheritance of pubs and independent shops. Even if you do not own property, you may get some pleasure from their existence, which will also be reflected in property values.

If the public realm is allowed to decay for lack of maintenance, both rich and poor suffer, though it is the poor who are most likely to rely on the buses or walking. Hence property values and

research into preferences can be useful in countering the arguments for doing away with planning. Indeed ongoing work on a practical tool from the Royal Society of Arts enables you to compare places in terms of Heritage Index, and many factors have already been mapped[6].

The value of streets

A concise review of the extensive literature on the value of streets is contained in a pamphlet by Nicholas Boys Smith AoU, the founder of the charity Create Streets[7]. With 241 references, there is an excellent synopsis of what people value. Indicators such as life expectancy or property values suggest that the old inner suburbs do best. Surprisingly perhaps green and open space are not the key determinants that might be expected. Of course prosperity matters most in predicting wellbeing, longevity and childhood obesity. People do sort themselves, given choice, into the best looking places. But fresh research using data from London shows that the best-connected places perform best.

Improvements to our 'common wealth' depend largely on public expenditure or philanthropy, and property taxes bear most heavily on the poor. There are a host of projects that cost much less than High Speed 2 or Hinkley Point C and that have a greater impact, such as pedestrianised streets or trams (as in French cities such as Montpellier), but which do not get adopted in the UK because there is no money for them. Yet these are the factors that urbanists tend to notice when they 'rate' a great city or neighbourhood. Major disparities and the quality of

local infrastructure should concern economists, for they may well lead to riots or anti-social behaviour, which do have a real economic cost (even if counted positively in the national economic statistics!).

A city like San Sebastián, winner of the Academy's 2015 European City of the Year award, is not only great because it is wealthy, but also because deprivation is spread around the city, not concentrated. It could well be that one reason why the Basque country has been so successful economically, with 25 per cent of people still working in manufacturing, is because it has been made so easy to get around, and because the common spaces are so well looked after. Undoubtedly the look of a place conditions how both residents and investors feel and behave, and so deserves to be properly valued. A research project by CBRE provides evidence that better quality of housing design in schemes such as Newhall, Harlow, can lead to higher prices, especially in areas of high demand. So people do appear to value amenity.

Conclusion

In short those who are making long-term investment decisions, such as a building or an infrastructure project, would do well to understand urban economics, but then go beyond conventional property measures, such as land values, to the factors that shape long-term value or resilience, and that add to our common wealth. It is these factors that urbanists should seek to identify and promote. For as Einstein once said: "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU chairs the new URBED Trust, and founded URBED 40 years ago.

1. Paul Cheshire, Max Nathan and Henry Overman, Urban Economics and Urban Policy, Edward Elgar, UK

2. Competing with the Continent: how UK cities compare with their European counterparts, Centre for Cities 2016

3. Thomas Piketty, Capital in the 21st Century, Harvard Press 2014

4. Jeffrey Sachs, Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet, The Penguin Press, 2008

5. Martin Large, Common Wealth: for free, equal, mutual and sustainable society, Hawthorn Press, 2015

6. Nicholas Boys Smith, Heart in the Right Street: beauty, happiness and health in designing the modern city, Create Streets 2016

7. CBRE Place Making and Value, 2016

Smarter urbanisation and valuing local capital

Following the recent publication of *Urbanism*, a compendium of the Academy's Great Places from 2009-2013, **Nicholas Falk AoU** asks whether quantitative data could be used to support the qualitative assessments of the award judges. Two recent reports, '*Competing with the Continent*' from the Centre for Cities, and European Union study: '*The State of European Cities 2016*' may provide some clues.

The AoU's strength, like the Good Food Guide, lies in the experience of its members. But its declared aim to '*learn from place*' is 'fiendishly difficult', as the authors of *Urbanism* conclude. Hence there are no 'templates or simple best practice lessons' in this beautifully illustrated compendium. But even a food critic takes note of the cost of the meal, and judges more than just the taste. So after 10 years of looking at towns and cities all over Europe, are there ways of refining our judgements and recognising transformation in difficult circumstances?

Starting with the economy

Huge progress has been made in recent years in handling 'big data', with GIS (Geographic Information Systems) allowing comparisons that transcend local authority boundaries. These lead to various forms of indices or ranking, such as those published by *Monocle* or the *Economist Intelligence Unit*. It should be worth looking at the places that score highly but that have not yet been assessed by the Academy. A good place to start is the Centre for Cities report, *Competing with the Continent*, on how UK cities compare with their European counterparts.[1] Backed up with a data tool that allows you to make your own comparisons, the report compares 330 cities across 17 European countries.

The report shows how poorly British cities generally compare with their Continental counterparts, apart from London and a few exceptional stars like Oxford and Reading. Indeed, the Centre for Cities considers the UK ratings to be most similar to places in Eastern Europe on factors such as skills, innovation and productivity, which is what they regard as most important. The poor showing can partly be explained by suburbanisation, which has in the past attracted the most talented to move away, and also by poor transport links and an over-academic form of education.

But there are also important political, geographic and historic factors that the report does not bring out. Provincial cities on the Continent benefit from having played much wider roles, which has left them with a legacy of fine buildings and public places. They also generally have stronger economic bases, particularly in smaller cities where there is often still a major manufacturer in premises that in the UK would have been redeveloped for retail. As it is businesses, not local authorities that compete for markets we would do well to pay more attention to peripheral industrial towns that have 'turned around' such as Donostia / San Sebastián in the Basque Country (the winner of the 2015 European City of the Year award), or Kassel or Leipzig in Germany, which are profiled in *Good Cities Better Lives*.[2]

Connecting cities

The UK's evolution as an island off the coast of the Continent has also had a profound influence on the quality and size of its cities as well as their roles. While Britain may have benefited from early industrialisation in the first part of the 19th century, thanks to plentiful coal, and was well suited to imperial trade thanks to a host of ports, its cities are not so well-connected today compared with those on the Rhine or other great rivers.

Maps within the Centre for Cities report highlight the close proximity of most British cities to each other, as also is the case in Belgium and the Netherlands. However in France and Germany, where towns are more

dispersed, there are well-connected clusters outside the capital city. For example, Heidelberg, which rates far above Oxford in patents per 100,000 inhabitants (a measure of innovation), undoubtedly benefits from its location in the high-tech state of Baden Wurttemberg, and proximity to industrial powerhouses such as Karlsruhe, to which it is linked by both tram and trains. As the report stresses though, large cities are generally more innovative than smaller ones, agglomerations can fight back if they have the right governance.

Even more insights can be drawn from a mammoth European Union study, *The State of European Cities 2016: Cities leading the way to a better future*. This report compares major cities with over 250,000 people in their 'Functional Urban Areas' in a superb series of maps and charts. Europe turns out to be less urbanised than some parts of the developing world, but has a much denser network of cities. Most people live in mid-sized cities, not capitals, and unlike the UK, European mid-sized cities do better than average.

Tackling inequalities

Economic success is normally measured in GDP per head, or productivity, where only London, and surprisingly Dublin, stand out as 'very high-income regions in the British Isles. The contrasts between the English North and South are vividly shown. The EU study goes beyond the Centre for Cities in explaining economic success.

'*Several factors can boost urban productivity; human capital, the quality of the business environment,*

Switzerland

entrepreneurship, quality of institutions, market access, access to capital, costs of land and labour, as well as research and innovation.'

Significantly, the cities that stand out in terms of **Life Satisfaction** include Munich and Leipzig, Antwerp and Graz, and Zurich, rather than the capital cities, which may offer useful lessons for our second cities. The cities that are thought as offering 'good housing at a reasonable price' turn out to be Eastern Europe, or in the UK in Tyneside and Belfast. So expensive housing may be one of the prices of success!

Inclusivity is about more than affordability, and there is an interesting comparison of the degree of segregation or dissimilarity, which

reflects the concentration of social housing. Here the cities in the former Soviet Bloc do best, and most capitals have worsened in the decade after 2001.

Mobility in terms of car dependence varies hugely, with the Netherlands doing best in taming the car, and Britain worst along with France. However, France is much more rural than the UK, and our authorities need to learn from cities like Vienna, where car trips fell from 40 to 27 per cent over a couple of decades, and in most cities cars are now used for less than 30 per cent of trips. In contrast, rail-based transport has greatly increased its usage in Western Europe. London and the South East stands out as having the most congested road network, perhaps

Population by degree of urbanisation per country, 2014
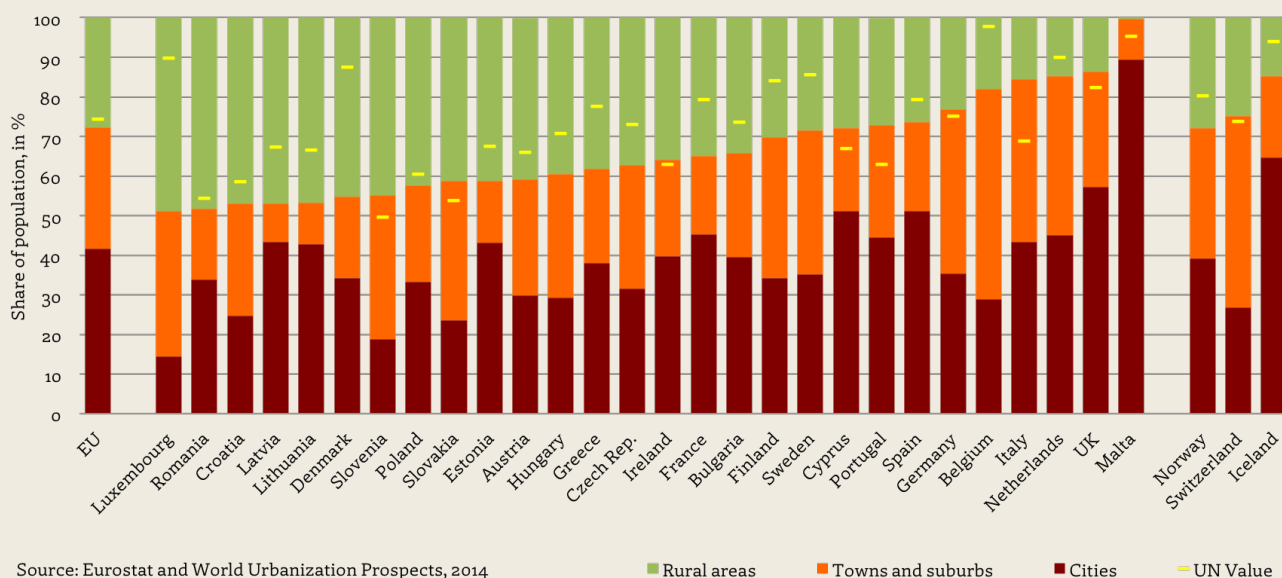
Source: Eurostat and World Urbanization Prospects, 2014 · Rural areas · Towns and suburbs · Cities · UN Value

Aspern Landscape

City Shuttle Trains

because in the extensive suburbs cars are used much more. A fascinating chart shows how cities compare in access to public transport, with Bilbao, Lyon and Marseille doing notably well, while Dublin and Manchester lag behind. This shows that what matters is not just having a few iconic tram lines, but integrating the whole suburban rail network in a seamless system. The outstanding cycling cities are Groningen in the north east of the Netherlands and Copenhagen, both of which have bitter climates in winter.

Natural resources also matter, and the EU suggests measuring access to green spaces within a 10-minute walk, making use of the *Copernicus Urban Atlas*. As cities are denser than rural areas, they use infrastructure much more efficiently. Paris is denser than London in the first 10km but beyond that very similar. But the relationship between urban form or densities and environmental performance is not yet understood, and many small green spaces may be much better than a few larger ones. Pollution tends to increase with city size, as more trips are made.

The UK appears better suited to efficient public transport than much of the rest of Europe, which suggests that the declining usage of buses could be reversed. However it is in Scandinavian cities such as Malmö that the greatest progress has been made in tackling the causes of climate change. The Amsterdam Smart City initiative is

notable for its 80 partners working for a low carbon city, while Manchester is praised for its University Living Lab initiative and innovation district.

Urban governance comes last, but probably is the most fundamental key to success. In Europe as a whole, local government is responsible for almost half of public investment, whereas the UK stands out for being so centralised. It is the metropolitan area that matters so that cities need to work as networks. But the UK suffers from being amongst the lowest in local autonomy, far behind the leaders such as Denmark and Germany, and falling behind even the former Soviet Bloc countries in local self-rule and local public investment relative to GDP.

Can the UK respond?

The UK is currently pursuing mergers into Combined Authorities where others are fragmenting. The average municipality in Switzerland, one of the best performing counties, has a population of 3,500 inhabitants, whereas in the UK it is around 150,000, five times the level in most of the rest of Europe. Unless ways can be found of generating fresh local sources of income, most of the UK is likely to fall even further behind. So the last report to be reviewed, PWC's *Good Growth Index*, proposes an Agenda for Action that calls for '*Proactive local leadership …to define the vision and identity for the place — what city stakeholders want the*

city to be famous for.' This is surely one job where the Academy should be able to help!

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU is executive director of The URBED Trust.

1. Hugo Bessis, Competing with the Continent, Centre for Cities September 2016

2. Peter Hall with Nicholas Falk, Good Cities Better Lives: how Europe discovered the lost art of urbanism, Routledge 2014

Making it happen

The Urbanism Awards provide important inspiration and lots of good ideas for what a great city, neighbourhood or street should look like. But how to get there from here remains largely unresolved and involves tackling social and economic as well as physical issues. So in this review, **Dr Nicholas Falk AoU** considers a few recent guides, before suggesting what place leadership might involve.

The seven emerging principles set out in the Academy's Agenda for the Future of Urbanism – drawn from 2016's Congress – are all highly relevant to creating better new neighbourhoods: 'forget utopia; understanding place; mix of uses, streets and permeability; walkable scale; plot-based urbanism; and flexible and loose fit'. But having visited most of the cities that qualify for the European City of the Year award, I wonder how do some places manage to transform themselves while others fail to make the grade?

Furthermore, as any city is made up of many parts, good and bad, you must first take account of their history as well as their geography. As Patrick Geddes memorably stated, "But a city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time". Perhaps planners and architects tend to focus too much on the physical – what you can see, touch and even smell – as opposed to the more ephemeral qualities that comprise social, economic and natural capital? So here are a few recent books that offer fresh viewpoints.

Psychology and the City

Charles Landry AoU has teamed up with Chris Murray, who once worked in psychiatry before eventually ending up as chief executive of the Core Cities group. This provocative booklet, one of a series of eight, provides a whirlwind review of the different schools of psychology and their urban potential. It contrasts human drivers that evolved from surviving in the natural world with urban realities, and explores how we can tap into the 'soul of a city'. A personality test provides a convenient tool for classifying cities, as curious or driven, for example, and should provide a better means of opening up a useful conversation than simply talking about transport or housing in boxes.

While simple insights like Maslow's hierarchy of needs remind us of the importance of fixing the basics first, as do concepts such as 'space to grow'. What interested me most was the possibility of moving from closed to more open cities, that is cities that question themselves and strive to do better for all. It is surely not enough to preach the value of 'a mix of uses', when so many places are better described as 'mixed-up' with unresolved conflicts between, say, cars and pedestrians, or young and old. Perhaps we are in danger of 'paralysis by analysis' where we end up with ever more boxes to tick, without being able to get out of them. So, understanding what makes a great city tick must help us in developing the leadership to face up to and overcome obstacles, such as lack of resources.

City of Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing are fast replacing 'sustainability' as a measure of what makes a good city. Hugh Barton AoU is well-placed to produce a radical guide to planning, having retired from his position at the University of the West of England, bridging the worlds of neighbourhood planning and place-making, and what creates healthier lifestyles. In his book *City of Wellbeing* he introduces a simple reality check under the economics of land and development, where plots have a lifecycle, shows how 'players in the game' interact to produce different types of urban form, and points out that, like transport 'Good urban form is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for improvement'.

This is a book that every urbanist should read if they want a highly readable synopsis of what is known, as well as a practical summary of how to apply the lessons, with some excellent diagrams and pictures. It calls for a different approach to planning education and an updated set of values, drawing on evidence from exemplars.

Interestingly, Barton first published a memorable diagram putting the human settlement in a global context back in 2006. This diagram looks remarkably like the 'doughnut' which has recently taken the world by storm, according to the author of *Doughnut Economics*. The book's author, Kate Raworth, shows not only the power of a good diagram, but also that the economic values that drive our capitalist system are being seriously questioned. By starting with the "big picture", rather than the numbers presented, everyone should see that we are on a journey to nowhere and on a precipice, to use two other analogies. Though acclaimed by *the Guardian*, I am not so convinced by her metaphor. To me the doughnut city is a city like Detroit with a hole in the middle where its heart (or the jam) should be, but of course she is right to reiterate the "limits to growth" and the importance of diagrams in understanding how things work.

Natural Capital

There are no diagrams or pictures in Dieter Helm's latest book *Natural Capital: Valuing the Planet*, but it is no less important, as he puts environment at the heart of the economy. Development planners complain that their masterplans are often disregarded when they come up against local objections, and political short-sightedness. Helm acutely argues for evaluating options in terms of their impact on assets or capital; what we inherit or get for free are particularly important. The UK's coalition government aimed to leave the environment in a better state and the then chancellor George Osborne asked Helm to advise them on how it should be valued. His answer requires maintenance to be properly funded. The concept might also be used to consider how any losses to the greenbelts, for example, can adequately be compensated for.

This is a beautifully written and logical book, and it is great pity that economics does not receive more consideration in training planners and would-be urbanists. Large-scale restoration of damaged land could be used to recharge our failing local economies, and rebalance our increasingly unequal society. As it is the Treasury, not Communities and Local Government, that holds the main cards, urbanists need to rethink the relationship between town and country as Ebenezer Howard once did. Few others will dare to cross the disciplinary and professional barriers.
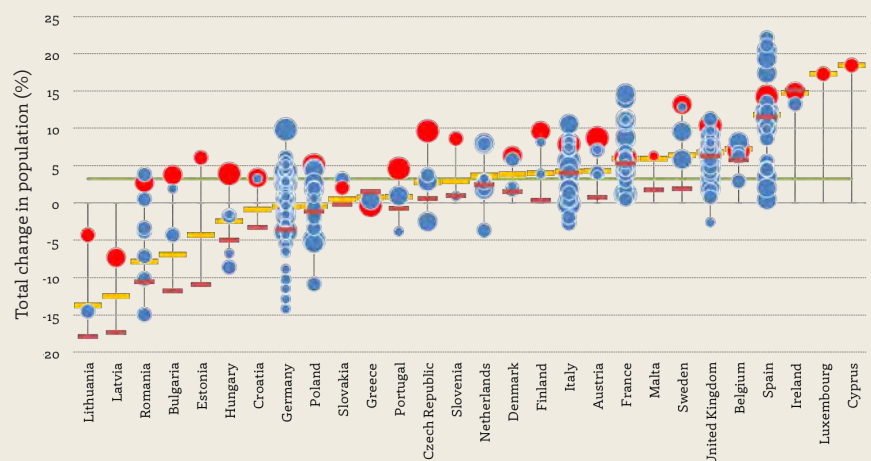
Future Cities

One urbanist who has managed to bridge architecture, development planning and transport is Camilla Ween AoU, and her concise book *Future Cities* provides a powerful set of stories of how to bring about or manage change in difficult circumstances. What is particularly good about this book is not only that it is very affordable, but also that the electronic version is full of web links that direct you to the source material for the many case studies. Ween states in the introduction: "This book sets out to explain the issues that will face rapidly growing cities in the next 20 to 30 years and how, building on sustainable practice already being introduced around the world, cities can and will grow and flourish". With no fewer than 100 ideas to choose from, as well as masterful summaries of all the key issues, if you were to read one book, this would be it.

The Creative City

Every urbanist will have read something of Jane Jacobs, but there is now a superb collection of her short works, under the title *Vital Little Plans*, which shows the breadth of her achievements. As the editors say, she sought a world of markets without capitalism and focussed on "the struggle of humans to forge new work from old in a society that favours established interests". Unlike most academics, she spent her life learning from what she saw from walking around and then from

Total population change by metric regions, 2002 - 2012

Projected population change by metro regions, 2015 - 2025

Source: Eurostat

— National Average
● Metro Region Capital
● Other Metro Regions
– Non Metro Regions
— EU-28 Average

Metro Region Population:
○ < 500,000
○ 500,000 - 1,000,000
○ 1,000,000 - 2,500,000
○ > 2,500,000
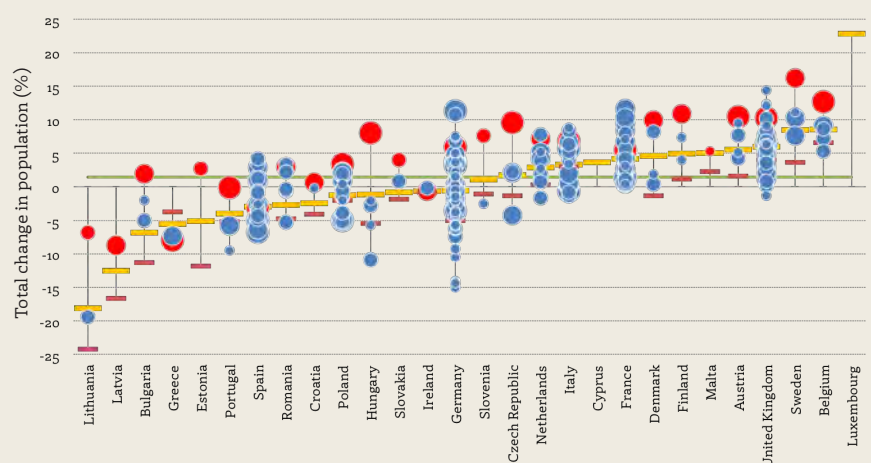
Jane Jacobs © *Phil Stanziola*

writing to explain why some cities grew while others languished. She was successful as a campaigner in stopping expressways being built across Manhattan and Toronto, but never won the full support of urbanists, like Lewis Mumford, who dismissed her as a housewife, or economists such as Edward Glaezer, who saw her as unrealistic. I think that was because she was as much a poet or ph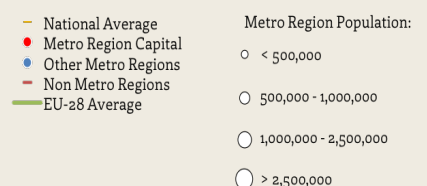ilosopher, relying often on assertions based on anecdotes. She is quoted as saying "City growth patterns, in sum, are messy", which is why she was loved by community activists, but dismissed by many professionals.

So how do we inject creativity into cities that are failing? Impressed as I have been with the arguments for going to scale, as the physicist Geoffrey West does in his epic study, and for accelerating the rate of development in places with real growth potential, I am struck by the greater importance of valuing quality over quantity, and going for 'great ideas, small projects'. So in answering the AoU's challenge of how to make 'it' happen, I suggest we reflect on how quality (or complexity) can be fostered over time, and how to avoid what we really value being needlessly lost. In particular, this means analysing what leaders do in getting others to follow them, and also understanding what enables people to behave in more collaborative ways.

For those wanting to widen their leadership skills I suggest one of the many books dealing with the art of war. Correlli Barnett ably explains The

Collapse of British Power between the two world wars as the failure of business and government to face up to reality – a criticism that applies equally to the Brexiteers. "They continued to lack the inner restlessness of American and German businessmen and the pleasure of these nations in efficiency and growth". That was first published in 1972, but writing in 2013, David Reynolds, a historian of the First World War, warns that "For two decades after 1945 the British lived, more or less contentedly, in the reflected glory of the Second World War".

So complacency and the tendency to look for simple short-term answers are the real enemies. A simple ABC of place-making leadership can be explained using case studies as Ambition, followed by Brokerage, but above all applied over time, through Continuity. The cities that have had the will to transform themselves, such as Freiburg or Rotterdam, have stuck at it, and continued to learn from the best. How tragic that the UK should be turning its back and disappearing into a black hole, when investing in transforming our cities could provide the most practical means to a better life for all. 'Making it happen' should be our rallying cry.

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU is executive director of The URBED Trust.

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Smarter urbanisation and capital values

In this article **Nicholas Falk AoU** connects the evolution of ideas on capital and competition, with the digital revolution that is shaping the growth of cities and suggests how we could use multiple criteria to reshape the growth of towns and cities.

Old theories

It is 150 years ago since the publication of *Das Capital: a critique of political economy*, changed the way economists think about development. Karl Marx explained growth in terms of social classes and their relationship to the means of production. Property ownership explains why some prosper while others live in poverty. Less than a decade earlier, Charles Darwin had published the equally influential *Origin of Species by Natural Selection*, which explained growth in biological terms through how a myriad of different organisms mutated and competed for survival. This image undoubtedly influenced Marx.

As the world grapples with creating environments that favour social and economic growth and wellbeing in the face of demographic surges and the loss of traditional jobs, we need a more dynamic model, which I call Smarter Urbanisation. This starts with what people need to be happier and build better neighbourhoods. Most want 'fit' or 'compact towns' not 'fat' or sprawling mega cities with tower blocks that 'cost the earth'. The model of a garden, which is as old as the Garden of Eden, could yield simple rules for better or smarter towns that will thrive and endure.

Capital and stewardship

The worst effects of industrialisation such as pollution have been controlled through Clean Air Acts, and Town and Country Planning. Cities such as Birmingham introduced 'gas and water socialism' while philanthropists provided parks that were carefully stewarded. The 'threat of communism' kept Western nations together for a while. But global trade in manufacturing has transferred capital and jobs from West to East. In a few decades the Digital Revolution transformed the supply chain and what and how we consume, which is well documented in *The New Industrial Revolution*[1]. In the UK local authorities ended up with their powers and resources stripped back. We will need a stronger vision to overcome divisions and a general lack of capacity.

The contradictions are indeed glaring. The French economist Thomas Piketty revealed in his influential book *Capital in the 21st Century* that the gains from owning capital, largely houses, far outstrip the growth in wages[2]. The gains work out about six per cent a year on average since 1870 compared to three per cent for wages, so wage earners can never catch up. Home ownership has become the predominant means of accumulating private capital, or

financial wealth, rather than investing in stocks and shares. House prices have consequently become unaffordable for those not on the ladder. Land values have escalated as a result, profiting the few not the many, while the masses worry about meeting their mortgage or rental bills.

Apart from a few exceptions such as Daniel Glazier in *The Triumph of the City*, economists have been spatially blind. They overlook the factors that cause creative people to move from one place to another and start or grow a business there. While companies, even market leaders, often only last for decades, cities with their extensive infrastructure go on forever. But the location of innovation is shifting. Cities in the past had real advantages over small towns or villages. But while a city may 'take-off' by exploiting an asset such as a river, a market, or even a university, the key lies in extraordinary people. A powerful essay contrasts the lives and works of Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin to show '*the slow emergence from a culture of faith and fear to one of observation and argument, and from a belief in the judgements of divinity to a belief in the verdicts of history and time*[3].'

The most dynamic change makers, such as James Dyson or Steve Jobs,

are not to be found in large cities any more. Like Cadbury at Bournville, Google are building a new town for their employees near Palo Alto, many of whom currently live in San Francisco. The starting point is not simply land ownership but communications that enable other places to be reached swiftly. A town on a junction will do better than one on a branch line to nowhere, a dead end. Super-connectivity is what science cities as diverse as Cambridge, Freiburg, Grenoble, Palo Alto and Singapore have in common, despite their obvious differences[4]. Their environment not only favours innovation, but also provides better places for children to learn and develop, as well as more choices in terms of places to do research or work.

Time and care is then needed to accumulate the economic, social and environmental capital to become self-sustaining. To cultivate more change makers we should learn from the metaphor of a garden. Incubation calls for suitable environments, whether it be soil, water or light. New growth needs saving from weeds through stewardship or careful management! Deserts can be made to bloom under special circumstances, but it is much easier to plant a market garden in established soil. The prudent gardener starts seedlings off in a greenhouse, away from threats and with plenty of light. New towns on a redundant airfield may never get off the ground.

Shaping the future

The 'natural' form for smarter urbanisation may no longer be a grid, which was right when infrastructure came in metal pipes. But what shape should growth towns aspire to? In a follow-up study for the National Infrastructure Commission on the Cambridge Milton Keynes Oxford arc *Partnering for Prosperity*, Tom Holbrook of 5th Studio refers to *String Cities*, and many different patterns of urban growth. But studies of property values show that people want access to green space, but not so much as to reduce accessibility or connectivity. In turn, the economic value of proximity to transport nodes and views of the countryside generates a pattern of growth over time, which can be seen in aerial pictures of city lights by night. The problem is that when most people choose to use private cars, the roundabouts on the edge clog up, and the centres become grid-locked. Smart technologies like autonomous vehicles do not tackle the roots of congestion.

A better shape is more like a snowflake, with six points, and none of them the same. Ebenezer Howard's original drawing for the *Social City* showed a polycentric network of towns linked by high quality transit systems, and separated by actively used countryside. The submission that won the 2014 Wolfson Economics Prize applied this idea to growing cities like Oxford and York. David Rudlin's new book with Shruti Parikh, *Climax Cities,* analyses the built form in leading cities throughout the world. What architect Brian Love terms the *Connected City*[5] intensifies areas around stations or stops along a transit line connecting up several major towns to generate enough activity to make better services viable.

Smarter urbanisation

A host of cities around the world aspire to be **Smart Cities** from Eindhoven and Manchester to Shanghai and Hyderabad. Organisations selling ICT such as IBM or Google and consultants such as PWC have broadened interest in the concept. Singapore has gone furthest in its vision for '*a city in a garden*' with electronic road pricing to even out traffic flows. The Future Cities Catapult concludes that "*City authorities have at their disposal a raft of levers and enablers, which on analysis are not being fully utilised*"[6]. The term Smart Cities, like sustainability or resilience, is open to interpretation.

Thus the Indian prime minister Modi has committed the country to supporting a hundred smart cities through smarter infrastructure. China aims to build 1,000 new towns, using the latest 'smart' technologies, and is keen to learn from practice elsewhere. But what does a 'smart city' really mean? The definition needs to go beyond technologies. Terms like intelligent or wired, and the creative or learning city, could form part of a new 'sharing economy', but the cities that score best on indices may have good intentions, but are still a long way from mobilising the investment needed to tackle social exclusion[7]. Shakespeare put it best when he wrote "*What is a city but its people?*"

A true 'learning city', which both develops and applies knowledge, does not just make the most of ICT, such as smart phones of data hubs, but also human interaction, as Charles Landry has pointed out[8]. This might be called real intelligence, not artificial intelligence. This calls for technologies that allow for environmental and social impacts – collective over individual

The Garden City Concept by Ebenezer Howard
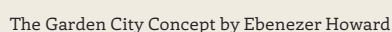
Electric Road Pricing toll collection scheme adopted in Singapore to manage traffic

transport, active over passive transport, like bikes and walking, and the 'Omnibus' over the autonomous vehicle. A useful review of the literature with 89 references distinguishes between **technology** factors that favour integration, **human** factors that favour learning, and **institutional** factors that favour good governance[9].

The term 'smart' can also be applied to many sub-systems including transportation, environment, energy education, health care and safety. What matters most is how well these are joined up, and therefore how projects are designed and financed. While the concept may have started with electrical systems, it is now time to draw on ecological as well as economic concepts such as balance or equilibrium.

Real cities that work

Economic factors are fundamental, and their impact on both the way we live (the social dimension), and on the environment (the physical dimension). But what would a better future look like? As the greatest value today is attached to brands rather than physical assets, (think of Apple) it is easy to fall for the many tempting visuals, for example libelium.com. But despite the appeals of *Capitalism without Capital and the Doughnut Economy*[10], and companies like Uber, Facebook or Trivago and the 'weightless economy', real development takes finance. Investors in turn require an assured return and the security provided by property.

So as most private wealth is stored in the value of houses, then a post-capitalist society is likely to look very different from the industrial towns that grew up around manufacturing

factories or mills. In particular the relationship between town and country will be very different, as *Financial Times* writer Peter Marsh suggests. For example instead of second homes and cars, we could well see a huge growth in hiring services rather than owning products, as already happens with smart phones. ApartHotels in major cities and cohousing schemes in smaller towns are other good examples of the 'sharing economy'.

Conclusion

To achieve smarter development we need four-dimensional frameworks which relate the three fundamental measures of economic, social and environmental wellbeing or capital in a mutually beneficial way over time. This may be achieved diagrammatically through a form of triple helix or a pyramid made up of trellises

To make better decisions on where to invest, we should take more account of the natural capital that Darwin celebrated and Dieter Helm has brought up to date, the economic capital involved in property that Thomas Piketty has charted, and the social capital that we are only just starting to value. Such growth will be 'smarter' because it is more intelligent and better looking than the alternatives. It also should produce better returns on investment over the longer-term A new report for the Greater London Authority *Capital Gains* may help show the way[11].

Dr Nicholas Falk is executive director of the URBED Trust

For more information visit smarterurbanisation.org and urbedtrust.com

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Resourcing smarter housing growth in the UK

The profusion of reports and recommendations on how to 'fix' the UK's broken housing market, and double housing output makes it hard to see a practical solution. Following up The Academy of Urbanism's response to the Housing White Paper, which focuses on improving quality, **Nicholas Falk AoU** illustrates what is possible, given the will[1] .

Trumpington , Cambridge

The idea for 'Smarter Urbanisation' is to develop places that are readily connected without a car, with a diverse community, a distinctive character, and measures for climate-proofing. These are the four themes of the Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth, and the results are now visible in the Southern Fringe of Cambridge around Trumpington, or the stunning development by the University at Eddington.

But how do we replicate quality beyond isolated experiments and go to scale, especially in areas where the housing market is far from buoyant, such as Stoke or Wisbech, and what should the government be focusing on?

Inspiration

Many of the most inspiring solutions have been documented in The Academy of Urbanism's European City of the Year award. They include not only German speaking cities such as Aspern Seesdadt in Vienna or Rieselfeld in Freiburg (near the border with Basle in Switzerland), which draw many visitors, but also the hundred or so urban extensions developed in the Dutch VINEX programme such as in Eindhoven (the site of the 2019 AoU Congress).

Then there are the Southern French 'stars' such as Montpellier or Bordeaux, and the extraordinary regeneration successes of the Basque cities of Bilbao and San Sebastián in Northern Spain. But we could also learn from 'smart' cities elsewhere such as Singapore or Portland, Oregon. The challenge in all cases is to redirect the economic forces that have produced unacceptable disparities of wealth, congestion, and incidentally made England one of the fattest countries in Europe, to create smarter or more intelligent forms of growth.

The technical solutions are quite easy to specify. What is difficult is securing collaboration between different professions and sectors over time. I have called this the ABC of Smarter Growth – Ambition, Brokerage and, above all, Continuity – over the 15 or 20 years it takes to build new settlements in a report based on case studies[2]. The secret is finding fresh sources of money or capital by unlocking neglected assets, such as waterways or old buildings and joining forces with others, such as universities or community initiatives.

Unresolved issues

What the success stories have in common, and what we in the UK have largely lost, comes down to four politically contentious but vital issues where new capacity and institutions are required:

1. How to revive strategic planning to determine where, and where not, growth (or regeneration) should be focused? The UK did this after the Second World War with New Towns and Comprehensive Development Areas.

2. How to assemble and prepare land in locations where there is both the potential demand and infrastructure capacity, existing or planned (as in Warrington and Ancoats in the North, or Peterborough and London Docklands in the South)?

3. How to mobilise long-term and patient finance to install the local infrastructure that would open up sites for a diversity of builders (as local authorities, such as Barking, are starting to do again)?

4. How to fund and organise the stewardship that is essential to creating and maintaining communities with a mix of people of all ages, incomes and ethnic backgrounds (as in Letchworth Garden City and some development trusts, such as Coin Street)?

Better pathways

We can learn most from the European cities that have largely avoided house price inflation, as the following examples illustrate:

• In **Germany** you can learn not just from leading university cities, such as Freiburg and Tubingen that have pioneered cooperative approaches to development (BauGruppen), but also from the cities that have suffered most from industrial decline, such as Dortmund (with the restoration of damaged land in Emscher Park), or in the East German city Leipzig

Top: Ørestad, Copenhagen © *News Oresund / Flickr*
Right: Port Marianne, Montpellier

(through its policy of Integrated Urban Development and the *Leipzig Charter* published in 2007). There, local authorities, not private landowners or developers, take the lead in almost all cases, pooling land in multiple ownerships and even flooding former open cast coal mines to create a lake district.

- In **The Netherlands** you can see how the aims of Labour's Sustainable Communities Plan were successfully implemented in building almost a hundred VINEX extensions to existing towns with populations of over 100,000. The Dutch Building Rights or First Choice system enabled local authorities to pool land and then secure a diversity of house builders, including around 30% affordable housing, some of which is for sale on condition that any uplift in values is shared with the local authority. Again, control over land has been key.

- In **France** a straightforward planning system enables cities to grow around rapid transit lines, as in Port Marianne in Montpellier, or to regenerate under-used areas, using ZACs (Zones d'Aménagement Concerté). Local authorities are backed up by the huge state investment bank, Caisse des Dépôts, which employs some 33,000 experts and finances much of France's social housing. Interestingly deposits for buying a house help provide the bank's capital. French cities also benefit from the Aménagement

Transport, a charge on the payrolls of those employing more than ten. This helps explain why so many towns and cities have built trams and, as in Nantes, used them as the spines of new urban extensions.

- In **Scandinavia** many of the best examples of saving energy and water are due to local authority leadership, which includes acquiring land on the edge, as in Aarhus in Denmark or former military land as in Ørestad in Copenhagen. Old estates and new settlements have been developed at the same time, as in the port city of Malmö in Sweden. Cooperatives play a major role in managing 'intentional communities', as those who went to the AoU Congress in Aarhus may have experienced, and are particularly important in overcoming isolation among older people or new immigrants.

All the examples mentioned here have had to reinvent themselves. For example, people forget that Copenhagen lost industry and suffered high unemployment before a far-sighted municipal engineer started to take space away from cars, and restore civic pride. Where over a third of people cycle to work, people are not only happier and healthier, but they save money too. As Britain starts to rethink its role in the world economy, smarter urbanisation could hold the key.

Regaining our common wealth

Progress should be judged not by a few architectural icons but by the transformation of whole areas, attracting people to live in areas that were once scorned and abandoned. This is the true story of Bilbao's renaissance, in which the Guggenheim

was an incidental act on a stage set by the city council taking over the redundant shipyards for not paying their taxes. Equally important, the city invested in building a high quality transit system, all funded with loans that are being repaid out from rising property values and taxes. The contrast with much of South Wales or even Bristol is disturbing, as is the role played by the cooperative group Mondragon in creating good jobs out of existing industries like the railway manufacturer CAF (now supplying trams to English cities).

While there is no simple solution, local authorities need to take four steps to rebuild our 'common wealth':

- **Spatial growth plans:** Instead of scattering planning permissions around, investment needs to be concentrated where there is both potential demand and infrastructure capacity, while avoiding floodplains and areas of natural beauty. The process can be assisted through GIS-based mapping, as for example URBED did to win the 2014 Wolfson Economics Prize by showing how to double the size of Oxford as Uxcester Garden City. Once property values are mapped it is quite easy to show areas of land that are under or poorly used.

- **Land assembly powers:** Plans are worth nothing without the capacity to implement them. A good start can be made by pooling public land. In *Capital Gains: a better land assembly model for London*[3], we show how compulsory purchase powers should be used to assemble sites in advance of the uplift in land values from improving infrastructure. Councils could make major advances simply by joining up development with transport. Of course it would help to revise The Compensation Code, but a start could be made right away.

- **Cheap finance for infrastructure:** Once land values are harnessed, it becomes feasible to borrow the funds needed to upgrade local infrastructure, installing the roads and services, and building the schools and services up front. Private finance could be raised through bonds, incentivised by grants or soft loans. The debt can be serviced and repaid by selling off plots for development within an agreed framework.

- **Frameworks for balanced incremental development:** Finally, to make sure the process is equitable, efficient and effective, local authorities need to agree development frameworks that set the basic rules that fix land values. These include plot ratios and coverage, as well as the ratio of affordable and social to market housing. The ratios should reflect local circumstances, not national policies, and should precede masterplans. For Uxcester Garden City, David Rudlin AoU and I proposed allocating half the land to a community foundation, which in turn could develop and manage country parks, or lakes to hold flood water. Milton Keynes Parks Trust provides a good example.

The tide of interest in tackling land values should be used not only to build new settlements in growing areas but also to give communities a stake in areas that need regeneration. Hopefully the experience of the Academy's Urbanism Award winners can plant the seeds for a fresh crop of winning schemes.

Dr Nicholas Falk AoU is executive director of the URBED Trust

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URBED's triple helix model

- Physical
- Economic
- Social
- Investment

Growth over time
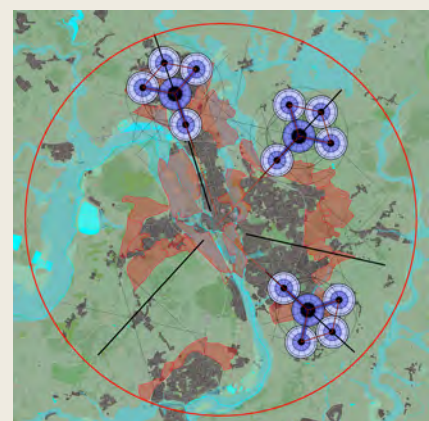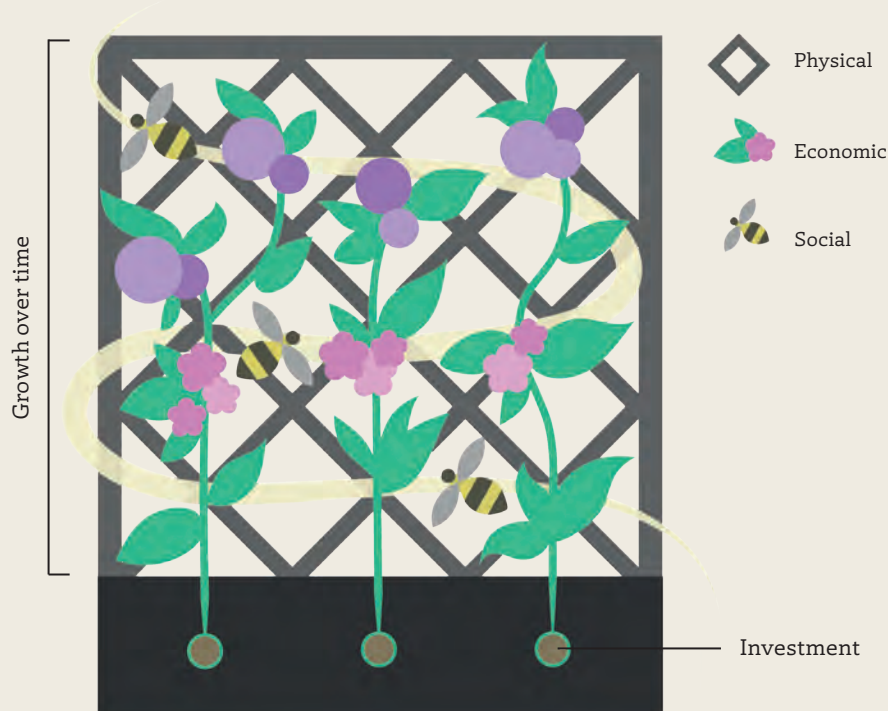
Uxcester Garden City, Oxford which shows how the city would grow at the edge around an upgraded transit system, avoiding areas of natural beauty or floodplains

Smarter urbanisation and rapid growth

How should cities grow and address the demands for more and better housing? Asks **Nicholas Falk AoU**.

A report from Shelter's housing commission recommends building three million new social homes, with examples drawn from the Academy's European City of the Year finalists such as Bilbao and Rotterdam[1]. Yet many towns and cities in the UK are stalled by uncertainty, economic weakness and inadequate leadership. In growth areas such as Oxfordshire, six councils have at last combined to commission a joint strategic spatial plan, and my new report for Oxford Civic Society suggests how options should be assessed[2]. In North Essex, three authorities have gone further in promoting a locally-led New Town Development Corporation to focus new housing on three large areas. But campaigning groups are opposing the scale of the growth that has been proposed.

Less is more

We lost capacity for large-scale spatial planning when the regional development agencies and government offices were scrapped. The useful Raynsford Review of Planning for the Town and Country Planning Association recommends the use of development corporations to plug the gaps, as 'people no longer perceive that councils as able to protect the public interest.' But after praising European practice, the report doubts whether we can ever copy their examples, as we are so divided.

Our towns and cities are sprawling, jumping over well-intentioned but ineffective greenbelts. Figures show

that people in the UK spend 50 per cent more time travelling to work than in Europe, a wasted hour a day. Most of the new housing estates have little relationship with the countryside and the pleasures that make life worth living. The NHS's Healthy New Towns Network is concerned to show how better planning and design will improve both mental and physical health.

Most campaigners in the UK spend too much time stopping housing being built, and too little promoting alternatives that would make people feel better. An exception is CAUSE, which has published a well-argued Metro Plan for development along the underused and electrified railway

line from Colchester to Clacton[3]. Yet despite a number of attempts, it has been difficult to engage support from the local authorities as they wrongly believe that garden communities need to be large to pay for infrastructure. Urbanists contrast our sprawling towns and monotonous housing estates with the way development is planned in most of mainland Europe. Politicians who have visited Freiburg such as Nick Boles MP and more recently Sir Oliver Letwin have come back converted, calling for local authorities to take the lead again. Developers may talk about 'garden villages', but end up building housing estates that lack the popularity of old established places built around connected streets. Create Streets have

Cambridge
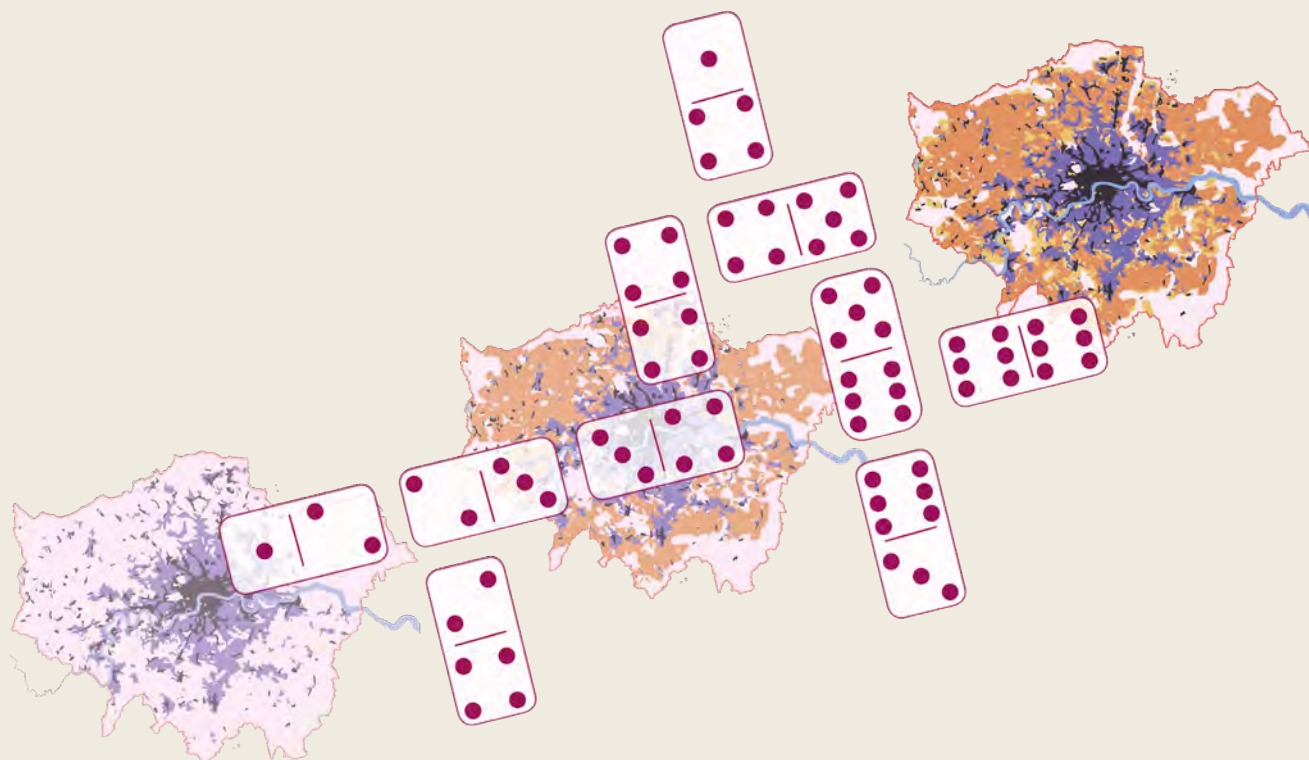
brought together extensive research on the failings of tower blocks[4], but perhaps the faults lie in our culture. We need to create healthier, walkable, beautiful and above all more affordable and connected communities, which means learning from cities that do this best.

Revolutions and surges

Building cohesive communities takes time, while politicians come and go. Regeneration takes a generation, 20-30 years, as the praised example of King's Cross illustrates. Even exemplary schemes in European cities, such as Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm, can take 3-5 years before agreement is reached with the main stakeholders. While cities may decay slowly, they grow in surges along transport corridors. The cover of our report for the Greater London Authority's deputy mayor for housing shows that city growth is more like a game of dominoes than a jigsaw puzzle[5]. Most urban extensions, apply the current thinking of the time, as for example London did when it expanded to the west in the 1930s by building over a million semi-detached homes off the new arterial roads and extended railway lines. The model was taken up in many provincial cities.

Growth rarely follows masterplans, as David Rudlin and Shruti Parikh

document in an extensive investigation of figure-ground plans they call *Climax City*. Some of the most valued places, such as Edinburgh New Town or Bloomsbury in London, are the result of long-sighted landowners parcelling sites out within some carefully chosen rules. The worst are the post-war excesses of system-built and standardised estates associated with Soviet planning and cities such as Glasgow.

The digital revolution has created a global economy, which reinforces the advantages that metropolitan and university cities have over others. The third tier of cities, notably Stoke and Sunderland, lag behind their continental equivalents in terms of both GNP per capita and affordability, and Brexit is likely to make their situation worse[6]. With extended international supply chains taking the life out of old high streets, future great places may be built around colleges, health centres, or even waterfronts and parks.

Arcs, grids or webs?

One key variable is urban form. The so-called Cambridge to Oxford Arc, via Milton Keynes (CaMKOx) should be a good place to experiment because demand is so strong. It is receiving a lot of attention because of the government's stated intention to build

a million homes there, with new towns and garden villages. There are a host of options illustrated in a report of possible frameworks for the National Infrastructure Commission[7]. But King Canute comes to mind, as there seems to be little understanding of either the economics of development or the history of urban growth, and as yet no agreed spatial plan.

To match our competitors in Europe, we need to bring back the kinds of planning and development used to build new towns or comprehensive development areas after the Second World War. We have to mobilise land in the right places, where infrastructure allows, and not be driven by what housebuilders find easiest or most profitable. By sharing the uplift in land values from development, at least in the growth areas of the greater South East, we could fund better infrastructure for all, and release national finance to redress the imbalances in the North.

Instead of the regular grids that were used in Milton Keynes, for example, which make attractive public transport unviable, we need a different kind of urban form. One solution is building urban extensions along transit corridors like the spines of fish bones, as in Hammarby Sjöstad in Stockholm or Rieselfeld in Freiburg. Instead of crude green belts, Green Webs should

link up waterways and woods in an accessible and ecologically sound manner. As infrastructure is so critical and expensive, and improving public health should be a priority, we should make the most of what already exists, for example intensifying areas around railway stations, not around motorway junctions.

Smarter urbanisation and development frameworks

The roots of the Brexit debacle lie not just in a divided Conservative Party but also in many places feeling 'left out.' New developments are often opposed because they offer nothing to the existing community. The UK2070 Commission has been set up under Lord Kerslake to tackle the regional inequalities that stem from industrial decline and one solution being considered is land value taxation. Authorities are starting to combine their planning efforts, for example in Manchester, not just to meet housing demand but also to improve access to jobs and services. We may even be rediscovering the benefits of what in the USA is called transit-oriented development through initiatives such as Connected Cities, and the idea is being tested out in a project in Tirunelveli in southern India.

Before masterplans are ever drawn up, the stakeholders need to agree the basic rules in development frameworks for strategic opportunities. These should specify uses, densities, and the amount of space to be left as green, as well as the proportion of affordable or social housing. This will set land values. The threat of using compulsory purchase powers plus changes to the compensation regime will make land assembly easier in 'growth areas', but we can also learn from both Dutch and German models where the public sector provides the infrastructure and then charges developers.

Smarter urbanisation should cut commuting times (and costs), which means concentrating development where infrastructure can cope. My report *Oxfordshire Futures 2050* calls for 'four-dimensional planning', with time being the fourth dimension. Development and improvements in transport infrastructure must be joined-up, and over a time period that may stretch out over thirty years. New spatial planning techniques make option assessment much easier, for example using Geodesign, and could be used to help share land value uplift more fairly.

We also have a rich set of inspirational models for possible futures, thanks to cheap international travel, the Internet, and award schemes. Study tours can change group thinking as they did in creating the *Cambridgeshire Quality Charter for Growth*.

But planning will be ineffectual unless it tackles the roots of social exclusion and create more cohesive communities, as cities such as Bilbao, Rotterdam, Vienna, and Leipzig have successfully done. Development frameworks can provide the tools to help our cities move forward, and so urbanists should seek to answer three tricky questions:

1. What proportion of land should be allocated to development and different uses, including affordable housing?

2. How much of the costs should be charged against the uplift in property values?

3. Which patterns of urban form will most likely minimise environmental impacts and support healthier lifestyles?

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Hammarby Sjöstad © *La Citta Vita / Flickr*

Shaping better and healther cities

At a time when local authorities seem to have so little power **Nicholas Falk AoU** looks at how cities can shape their future.

The National Audit Office's report assessing the government's performance on building new homes concludes that local authorities should not take the blame when so much is outside their control[1]. The report rightly recommends looking at the way infrastructure is financed, as this is not only critical to overcoming local objections but exceeds the cost of constructing each new house[2].

However, national investment in infrastructure has long been only half the equivalent in France or Germany, and the National Infrastructure Commission reckons that only a little over 40 per cent can come from taxation, with private finance covering the rest. The Policy Exchange and McKinsey both estimated £500bn is needed simply to tackle the backlog, so most government offers of capital funding are quite inadequate, based as they are on backing particular projects, like Crossrail, rather than funding investment programmes from which an economic return might be expected[34]. Therefore, we need to learn from what successful cities in other countries do.

As I have argued in reports for the UK2070 Commission and recently for the TCPA on *Sharing the Uplift in Land Values*, faster growing economies give local authorities greater powers to join up development and infrastructure[5]. Rebalancing Britain depends in shifting the way we tax or charge wealth, which is a more fundamental question than how to double the amount of housing we build each year.

Award-winning cities such as Copenhagen, Freiburg or Vienna are among the happiest places to live and work because they are much more equal, with much lower housing costs. Public transport plus cycling accounts for two-thirds of journeys to work, which seems almost inconceivable outside cities such as London where the car generally dominates. This is because local authorities have much more control over land, and take the lead in promoting urban extensions, which are much healthier as well as more sustainable than our car-based housing estates[6]. So could part of the answer lie in how we grow our mid-sized towns and cities with most potential? A series of books and reports offer useful evidence.
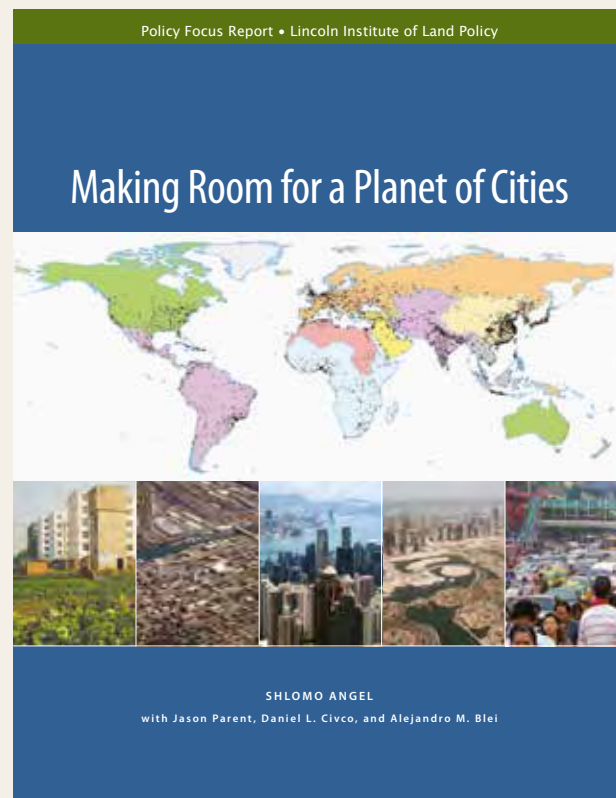
Climax cities

Politicians as well as planners should pay attention to the sobering conclusions in a new book by David Rudlin AoU and Shruti Parikh based on their exhaustive analysis of figureground plans at a series of scales from cities around the world. The book illustrates half of the 35 cities they have examined. The most interesting plans in my view are the Trellis Plans that take a 10 km radius or 4,000 ha area around the centre, and which contrasts buildings with the ground and green space[7]. The most recent cities such as Milton Keynes are the most wasteful of

Trumpington Meadows, Cambridge
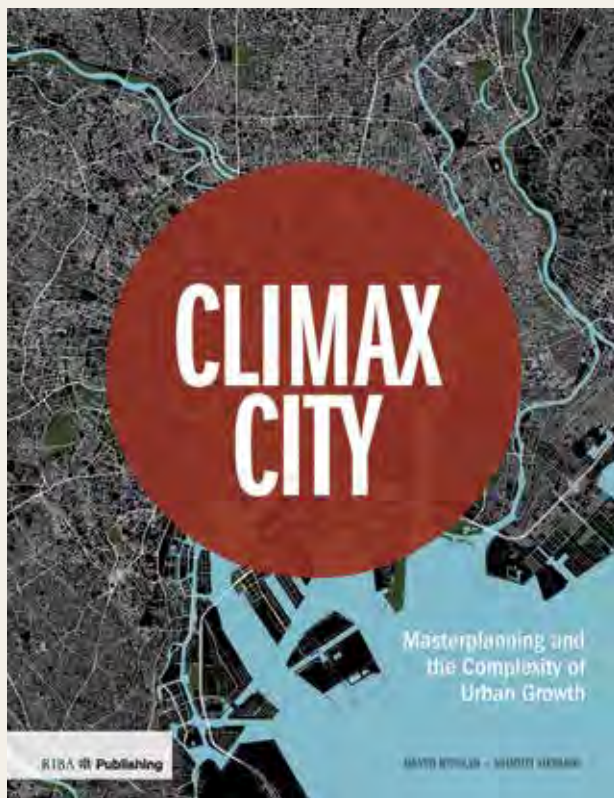
Climax City by David Rudlin AoU and Shruti Hemani

Making Room for a Planet of Cities

SHLOMO ANGEL

with Jason Parent, Daniel L. Civco, and Alejandro M. Blei

Making Room for a Planet of Cities by Shlomo Angel

space (unlike the cities we enjoy most, such as Paris). This is because priority was given to getting around fast by private car when MK's Development Corporation departed from the original principles set out in the Llewellyn Davies masterplan. By contrast, it is much more attractive to cycle in Copenhagen where parking provision has been cut back, or to use public transport in most continental cities with greater densities.

Getting into shape

As well as densities or floor area ratios, urbanists need to understand the 'urban form' or shape that cities take as they grow (or decline), as this is something that planners can influence through investment in public transport. Fat cities with holes in the middle, like Detroit, inevitably lead to longer and more expensive journeys to jobs while trapping the poor in the worst places. A free download from NYU-based expert on urban development Shlomo Angel brings together statistical data on over a hundred cities round the world in *Making Room for a Planet of Cities*[8]. He considers factors such as density and dispersal, as well as what he calls the 'fragmentation of city footprints', and his conclusion is that there is simply not enough room in cities in emerging economies such as in Asia to handle the projected population expansion. He rejects the model of the European

'compact city' in favour of planned growth on the edges by investing in advance in the land needed to build a peripheral kilometre grid, which incidentally was the model used in Milton Keynes.

A very different view is taken by architect Brian Love, whose book, *Connected Cities*, makes the case for growing towns and cities along the existing railway lines. He has demonstrated the potential of areas surrounding London, such as Hertfordshire, where many of the original garden cities and new towns are located.

Another useful picture is provided in Professor Michael Batty's latest book on the future of smart cities[9]. Mike is particularly interested in geometric relations, such as the 'fractal city', and recognises, like Shlomo Angel, that land area requirements can far exceed the growth in population. He praises URBED's Uxcester Garden City model, which updates Ebenezer Howard's original diagrams, and offers a range of other models. However, he concludes that it is impossible to know what the future will bring. Not only are so many different factors at work, but who can say what values will ultimately prevail?

Yet, as the science fiction writer William Gibson wisely observes: 'The future is already here; it is just

not evenly distributed'. Cities, like companies, compete for investment, and can learn from each other. So with the benefit of having visited and given awards to so many cities and places, what could The Academy of Urbanism contribute? One modest set of suggestions is set out in a timely report, principally drawn up by Jon Rowland AoU but with a lot of help from other urbanists[10]. The report proposes adopting a simple set of principles, with four recommendations to:

1. Reform strategic planning
2. Raise the standard of design
3. Open up new markets
4. Make housing affordable

A practical example comes from Cambridge, which my recent review ten years after the Quality Charter and related panel were launched, shows is well accepted by the development industry. Indeed, the Southern Fringe includes recent housing that could have come from the Netherlands[11]. However, a cautionary book from World Bank economist and planner Alain Bertaud combines economics and urbanism to question whether planners can do much to change market trends and consumer behaviour. The most desirable cities such as Vancouver, Melbourne and San Francisco have price-to-income ratios for housing that are twice those of sprawling cites such as Atlanta and Dallas, while London

and New York come in the middle. He concludes that the best way of making housing affordable is to focus on transport, and that artificial constraints such as green belts or density ratios are counterproductive.

Achieving good urban form

With so many pressures on planning, and so little power to combat the forces of either money or traffic engineering, how can urbanists enable towns and cities to change direction? Here are four suggestions from my own experience of learning from cities that have transformed large areas, and others can be found in Charles Landry's excellent booklet *Cities of Ambition*[12].

Start with connectivity
Instead of infrastructure following on from development it should play a leading role in planning where new development is located and how car dependence can be minimised. The experience of how the Netherlands planned a hundred VINEX new suburbs is particularly relevant, as those who attended the AoU Congess in Eindhoven can testify. As there are some 2,500 railway stations, plus perhaps another 150 where a new station could be justified, by focussing at first on land within 400 km of the station, a transformation could be achieved.

Measure what counts
Too often quality suffers because it is intangible and hard to value, like truth and justice. But the components can be identified and analysed, as Tim Pharoah is suggesting in a checklist produced for *Transport for New Homes*. By simply starting with the principles of holding car mileage constant, as Freiburg successfully did, a modal shift could be achieved which would be healthier for all.

Learn from what works
The most effective way of changing attitudes is to take mixed groups to places that face similar challenges but that have adopted different solutions. A good example is the Joseph Rowntree Housing Foundation's scheme at Derwenthorpe, which benefitted before it was built from the Sustainable Urban Neighbourhoods Network, but also from a visit to some Dutch new planned suburbs[13].

Go for fishbones, not grids
The final idea, which the URBED Trust is developing as a research project with the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis is to design sustainable urban neighbourhoods that support both public transport and walking or cycling, rather than car use. Can the rapidly growing and aspirational middle class in countries such as India be persuaded to share cars or public transport? It would be interesting to get others views on this under-researched subject.

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Aerial of Rieselfeld, Freiburg

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Reinventing town centres: A call for action

The coronavirus pandemic is a major threat to many of our town centres. **Nicholas Falk AoU** calls for action before it is too late.

Coming out of the current crisis will depend on fundamentally changing the way we work, travel and communicate if we are ever to recover. The Coronavirus pandemic could well kill off many town centres, if small shops and services fail to reopen, and even more households rely on home deliveries instead. The collapse of the Roman and some other empires were due to epidemics. So, what is to be done before it is too late?

At the time of writing the UK's town centres and high streets are in a state of suspended animation; alas the risks and costs of running a business mean that many of the independent shops and services, such as restaurants, will not reopen, while multiples use the Internet and home delivery. As the healthier experience of cities in Germany or South East Asia shows, there are better ways, but ones which the UK has persistently avoided due to our centralised and rather amateurish system of governance, and belief that town centres are all about retail.

'Change comes when the short-term logic of events intersects with the long-term evolution of ideas'

– Thomas Piketty, Capital and Ideology 2020

Eindhoven

Facing up to the challenges

URBED's new commission from the 1851 Exhibition Fellowship is gathering a hundred 'tales' from town centres large and small. As this is my tenth article for the *Here & Now*, instead of reviewing other people's books I have reflected on guidance my colleagues and I have produced over the last twenty-five years. The big issue for the future is whether to rely on returning to 'business as usual' or to take a more radical interventionist approach. If the latter route is chosen, where will investment produce best results?

Vital and Viable Town Centres, the good practice guide that backed up Planning Policy Guidance Note 6 on retailing, drew on a large survey of planning authorities. A fifth of town centres in 1995 were then thought to be 'declining', while only a few metropolitan cities and historic towns thought of themselves as 'vibrant'. At that time, the main challenge was out-of-town or edge-of-town food stores. The report contrasted the continental model of the 'compact' city with the American doughnut with holes where their centre used to be.

We developed a town centre health check methodology and a framework for developing strategies based on four 'A's – Attractions, Amenity, Access and Action. By 1997, Town Centre Management was widely established, and URBED produced *Town Centre Partnerships*, with a range of sponsors to show how it could be funded. On the back of 50 case studies

Climax City by David Rudlin AoU and Shruti Hemani

that included Portland, Oregon, and German towns, we called for Business Improvement Districts in larger towns, and for development trusts to reuse old buildings in smaller ones. We also recommended changes to the business rate which is an even greater issue today. At that time, 12% of shops were vacant, the 'charity shop' was changing the face of the smaller high streets, but the 'evening economy' had hardly surfaced, and the internet was still a dream!

Changing trends

New forms of retailing have continued to suck life out of high streets, helped by disempowered and depleted local authorities, aggressive developers, compliant financial institutions, a love of the new and a neglect of the old. The decline of manufacturing had released large areas of land on the edge of town centres. Whereas in Germany industrial sites were reforested or turned into lakes, for example around cities such as Dortmund in the Emscher Park in the Ruhrgebiet, in the UK brownfield development was subsidised, and activity dispersed. With greater choice, customers spend most where it is easiest, for example because of free parking.

New Life for Smaller Towns in 1999 praised local initiatives such as farmers markets and festivals. Checklists under five main themes with a hundred

questions in all, were reinforced by 40 loose-leaf case studies. The trends in high streets since then have continued to favour experience, not just comparison and convenience, with the rise of gyms, eating places and bars, barbershops and bookshops, and new markets. The key to success is adding value, not standing behind a counter. It is heartening that in Stroud where we live, the farmers market has kept going through the current crisis by taking orders instead, and neighbourhoods have kept community spirit alive.

Strategies for recovery

At the first Urban Summit in 2002, a new Labour government pledged to work in partnership with 24 towns and cities, and we helped a small group of civil servants to document and spread good practice, with an emphasis on creating partnerships. The resulting series of reports for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, *Partners in Urban Renaissance*, won a design award. But little was done to devolve power except for some experiments in the short-lived Regional Development Agencies. At its best, through *Yorkshire Forward* for example, not only were visions produced but major enhancement schemes were undertaken — such as through groups of towns in the Calder Valley including Todmorden, with its 'incredible edibles'.

Spreading the benefits of Town and City Centre Renewal (2005) for the local government association set out a series of tools for conurbations such as Portsmouth and Leeds, so that smaller centres would not be left behind. It concluded that "The unanswered question is how far places without the attractions of universities, good public transport links, and beautiful places or settings can ever hope to compete in the ever more competitive 21st century…". Since then the divorce of ownership from management has left most town centres adrift. This was aggravated by local authorities having to beg government for grants. How can town centre management be funded when even British mainstays such as Boots have been sold to foreign investors?

The impact of the trends, of course, depends on a centre's historic legacy. Post-industrial towns face the greatest challenges. Market or country towns, which are far more numerous in the South than in the North (and there may be over a thousand in need of help), have wealthy residents, often retired, who can be attracted with the right offer. Geographic position matters and isolated towns can sometimes prosper, like Ludlow in the Welsh Marches. Neighbouring towns can be overshadowed, as for example Gloucester is by Cheltenham, where both would benefit from stronger collaboration. Areas where values are low may appeal to creative people, as in Stroud – now listed as the second-best place to live in the south west, but still with excessive levels of vacancy, especially when charity shops are counted in.

Immigration seems to have strengthened suburban centres that serve niche markets. For example Uxbridge, the prime minister's constituency, has benefitted from the many offices around the centre, with a wider choice of places to eat. This was one of the success stories in *Over the Edge: town centres and the economy*, which in 2008 compared 50 centres in outer North and West London with centres such as Reading and Watford, which had broadened their role. Statistics on town centre employment and uses based on GIS provide a good tool for identifying comparative strengths.

Whether one town adopts the 'vision' of a transition town, a historic town or a learning city depends on how well different 'stakeholders' work together. Inspiration should be taken

from Urbanism Award winners such as the former East German city of Leipzig, the Dutch city of Eindhoven and the Spanish port of Bilbao, all of which lost their main employers but recovered as great cities. Comparable British initiatives include Birmingham, which dropped its inner ring road (with EU funding) following *The Highbury Initiative* of 1988; Liverpool, which created a city of culture, and Bristol, where the waterfront now seems as lively as any in mainland Europe, with an influx of stylish apartments.

The greatest challenges lie in the mid-sized towns. So, in this 'tragic' story of apparently doomed places, how is that some high streets have managed to counter the trends or ride the tides that lead on to fortune? This can only be understood by comparing towns in the 'leagues' in which they compete, or their place in the 'retail hierarchy', to use the jargon. We need to look at the whole town — its catchment area — to see where different kinds of people live and work. Comparisons should be made with similar places, not just the next town, for example Canterbury or Norwich with York, Blackpool or Hastings with Scarborough, Wolverhampton or Sunderland with Nottingham. Not all development should be welcome. The British seem slow at learning from others, so The Academy of Urbanism has a crucial role to play.

Apartments on Bristol's waterfront

Five steps to rapid recovery

As in a war, strategies are needed to mobilise the necessary resources where they will have most effect. We should recall that a coalition government commissioned the Beveridge Report in 1942, well before the war had ended, to give people hope of a better life. Recovery from the pandemic will take time so it needs to be phased. There are proven ways of reviving town centres which follow the four 'As' first set out our in *Vital and Viable Town Centres*, but reinforced with agency and animation. Suitably refined, these could form the basis for 'quality deals' to meet 21st century priorities such as public health and climate-proofing.

Here are a few suggestions:

1. **Action** *Get Smart*: Local authorities should use the power of digital technology to promote recovery. Mapping will help in setting priorities, for example identifying isolated and disadvantaged areas. Shops and eating places that offer good service should be highlighted. The URBED Trust's new report Smart Cities: learning from the pioneers shows what can be done by leaders such as Cambridge, Freiburg and Grenoble.

2. **Access** *Reallocate space*: Priority for should be given to 'active travel' (walking and cycling) which means 'taming' cars and promoting better integrated public transport. We should reallocate road space, as Copenhagen did, but also make short-term parking easier or 'free after 3.00'. Local authorities could take back the bus services and promote better local rail services in Metro areas with integrated transport hubs as Barnsley has done. Funding could come from charging out-of-town stores for parking when the business rate is reassessed.

3. **Attractions** *Open empty shops*: Redundant peripheral retail premises and surplus car parks need to be redeveloped as homes, workplaces and community hubs or social spaces. Local authorities should take over key buildings if they lie empty too long, as happened in bomb damaged Comprehensive Development Areas after the Second World War.

4. **Amenity** *Promote special places*: Streets and neighbourhoods with a distinct character, for example clusters of shops or services or waterfronts, should be boosted. Festivals and campaigns can help. Environmental

upgrades should counter the lure of out-of-town retail parks but go beyond expensive facelifts that are like 'putting lipstick on a corpse'. Spreading the benefits of regeneration must reignite civic pride as Stroud has done with its pioneering farmers market. .

5. **Agency** *Re-empower local authorities*: Most important of all government must as a matter of urgency release the resources for town centres to revive by recasting parking charges and property taxes. The time is ripe to rethink what town centres are for, and for a multitude of pilot projects. Partnerships should be set up to promote new uses for underused space and lessons shared through Beacon Council Schemes

Above all a new approach is needed to property. Where town centre development is no longer viable, retailing will have to contract so better uses can take over. This requires government to play a more proactive role. Publicly-owned land could be pooled, as it is in Copenhagen and Hamburg, with compulsory purchase orders used as a threat. Government is getting interested again in development corporations, and the reassessment of business rates promised for 2021 must not be deferred.

As the outlook for post-industrial towns and cities may seem bleak, a national priority should be to 'reinvent' places associated with the first Industrial Revolution, and breathe life back into them. A cross-sectoral action plan to follow up the UK2070 Commission report *Making No Little Plans* could provide the impetus for rebalancing Britain. A good place to start would be with the network of 23 or more Key Cities such as Gloucester and Sunderland, as well as historic cities such as Oxford that need to attract visitors again. So who will set up the first task forces?

Nicholas Falk AoU is executive director of The URBED Trust and is writing a new book on Smarter Urbanisation on how cities can change direction before it is too late.