

Preface

Urban places have always been difficult to comprehend, let alone plan, given their multifaceted character, heritages and constant change. Today, their increasing size, sprawl and dominance in our habitat have made this understanding an even more challenging task. At various times in history, a combination of processes led to the emergence of cities with new characteristics that often defined their age. At other times they have been threatened with a new range of problems that threatened their survival, or at least liveability. This was the situation in the developed world in the nineteenth century when the growth of innovations, production, trade and increasing liberalism promised a more fulfilling urban future. But this progress was soon accompanied by an urban development that had such high levels of mortality, squalor and poverty that they threatened the very survival of the cities. These difficulties led to new conceptions of urban public health and the engineering and social solutions that reduced mortality rates and modified the squalor and poverty. By the end of the century it led to the new ideas and policies that created the modern urban planning movement to control or at least modify urban development. In 1988 Peter Hall published an eminently readable book that summarised the major phases of planning urban places over the previous century, which included a human focus by describing the character and contributions of the major figures in the field. This valuable book and its subsequent editions not only described the various efforts to resolve the problems created by nineteenth century urban developments, but also how the new difficulties that emerged during the twentieth century were tackled. Yet many of the issues described by Hall are still with us—especially the persistence of disadvantaged areas and the seemingly built-in injustices in many places. Also many of the policies designed to provide better urban places led to new problems.

From the late 1980s increasing dissatisfaction about the urban condition emerged. It led to a cluster of new urban concepts, each seeking to improve urban places in specific ways. They have identified key problems in urban places and suggested new ways to solve, or at least mitigate, these drawbacks and their negative impacts on the environment. Many of these new urban ideas, summarized as city themes in this study, have been the subject of individual reviews. But there have been few attempts to provide a comprehensive *guide* to the character and utility of the various new themes, one that also creates an introductory *background* for later detailed

studies of contemporary urbanism, in specialized academic fields, such as urban geography, sociology, economics, etc., and also in those subjects with a more active bent that contribute to the construction and functioning of urban places. These two goals are the objectives of this book.

In many ways the text describes the major trends in improving urban development from the period where Hall ended his study, where he anticipated a new 'end of the century' moment, paralleling the late nineteenth century one that created new horizons, such as the City Beautiful, Garden City and Regional Planning concepts that provided much of the impetus for the development of planning in the twentieth century. Of course, the contexts of the new concepts that have attracted attention in the developed world of the past twenty or so years are very different. They have emerged in a more interconnected world, because of electronic systems and faster and cheaper transport systems. It is one that is increasingly dominated by large, sprawling urban areas—many of which in the developed world are viewed as having a too dominant car culture—and those with unanticipated rapid growth in the less developed world. These forces have created new urban regions of unprecedented size and number, which has led to extremes of wealth and poverty, with far too many living in conditions little better than those seen in the densely populated, squalid communities of the nineteenth century European cities. Although these new urban themes are different from one another, there is an underlying general aim to make places not only more liveable and sustainable, but also fairer or more just, although it is unfortunate that this later objective is often lost as other interests dominate.

As an Urban Geographer who also helped initiate and develop an interdisciplinary Urban Studies programme in the University of Calgary for many years, there has always been an awareness of the importance of looking at urban places in more comprehensive ways than those practiced in individual disciplinary fields. In this context three issues were important background features in writing this book. First, it is about time that more attention is being paid in the urban literature to environmental issues, through sustainable development ideas and by policies to mitigate the urban disasters inflicted by extreme natural processes. Such issues were almost ignored in most urban specialisms a generation ago, yet were still seen by many geographers as important contextual issues in urban development, although such issues rarely appeared in the standard urban geography texts. Second, spatial and global perspectives, long the bedrock of geographical interests, are vital in our closely interconnected world, and are now being pursued in many urban subfields. They provide even wider comparative contexts and also emphasize the locational divergences and connections within and between urban places, which mean that one can normally expect local and regional variations that lead to differences in urban places, even from general processes.

Third, another important consideration for somebody brought up in a British urban geography that emphasized the development of the morphology of urban places has been the need for an historical perspective in urban studies. This makes it possible to understand how towns and townscapes emerged, and through what cultural imperatives. It also makes one appreciate that many of the so-called 'new'

policies of the present are in part, at least, revivals of old and often forgotten ideas, although in new situations, putting the many fads and fashions of new urban ideas into a broader context. Many of the older ideas can be found in those masterful urban surveys by authors such as Mumford (1961) and Vance (1977) that deal with the history and culture of urban places. A temporal perspective also reminds one of the utility of forgotten premises of Geddes's (1915) early twentieth century work. One is the succinct phrase: 'survey first and plan second'. The other was his emphasis upon regional analysis to survey the resources, potentials and drawbacks of the region around cities, the human responses, and the variety and complexity of the resultant cultural landscapes—ideas that came from the French geographical regional tradition. This focus upon understanding the context and the problems of existing landscapes first, is not simply to appreciate the variety of cultural townscapes which enhance the human experience. It provides the opportunity to assess the limitations, risks and possible negative effects created by new developments, rather than looking only upon the positive results—or rather assumed positive results—which all too frequently have focused upon profit maximization, rather than upon the utilities of the projects for people. It also provides understandings of previous historical phases, making it possible to provide links to the new developments, rather than only obliterating the past in the name of progress. Certainly much of my own research stayed far from these roots in trying to provide more empirical rigour to urban analysis, and more recently in how exploration narratives are constructed. Indeed the biggest challenges have always been in trying to interrelate, if not integrate, a series of what were often seen as disparate ideas to provide greater coherence to the study of various urban phenomena or ideas. The attempted integration is not simply in human terms through conceptual overviews, but also through the integrative methods of multivariate analysis, although the following chapters only provide examples of the former approach.

This project developed out of a classroom need to review the emerging new urban themes against the context of the main twentieth century ideas, problems and policies of urban development. It has benefitted from discussions with many of the members of the Urban Geography Commission of the International Geographical Union (IGU). Indeed three of its members—Professor Ivan Townshend (Lethbridge University), Dr Niamh Moore-Cherry (University College, Dublin) and Dr Susan Ball (University of Paris, 8)—were kind enough to collaborate on the project by providing chapters in this study. Their assistance was appreciated. Others helped in a more indirect way in broadening my understanding of urban places, through their willingness to host IGU conferences in their home cities. Over the past twenty years these and other meetings provided me with the opportunity to visit and lecture in many diverse urban centres around the world—in Japan, China, Korea, Australia, Mexico, United States, South Africa, Tunisia, France, Italy, Slovenia, Switzerland, Ireland, The Netherlands, Britain, Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Poland and Spain—as well as the fortune to have short-term teaching positions in universities in Cape Town, Tokyo and Dublin. These visits enabled me to learn from the local experts about the essential characters and drawbacks of their cities and what policies were being adopted to provide solutions. Although many of the formal lectures

in the conferences were useful, the more effective insights often came from field excursions and informal discussions, which provide the more tacit exchange of information that has been recognized as crucial in the development and adoption of policies lying behind many of the themes dealt with in this study, although most apply to the urban places in the developed world.

It must be admitted that as this project evolved additional material was incorporated, which led to delays in its completion and far longer chapters than were originally contemplated. In this context thanks must be provided to the patience of various personnel in the publishers, especially Bernadette Deelen-Mans and Mirielle van Kan, whose constant encouragement and good humour helped in the always lonely task of an author. I also appreciate the fact that the Department of Geography in the University of Calgary allowed me to use the facilities of the department in working on this project. In particular I am grateful for the help of Robin Poitras, the department cartographer, for his skill in drawing the various diagrams and his willingness to redraft figures when I wanted modifications. Various other people have also helped by reading and commenting on various chapters or parts of them, especially Ivan Townshend and Rhiannon Shah, while my former colleagues and friends in Swansea, notably Dr Graham Humphrys, have always provided a 'home from home' that has enabled me to discuss ideas and to have a U.K. base to explore other libraries and cities, helping to provide material for this study. Of course the weaknesses others will find in the text are all my responsibility. One of the biggest difficulties faced was to select the themes to be dealt with in this work. Soon after starting it was realised that that they could not all be covered because of space limitations. So choices had to be made, the problem of all writers. I only hope that most will agree that the themes chosen are the most important ones of the past few decades, and that there are justifications for leaving out those themes that others will believe are of more value to their interests. Also it must be stressed that the emphasis of the book is primarily upon the developed world, although many of the themes discussed could be usefully adopted in cities in less developed countries, so long as they are adjusted to their cultures and circumstances and have local involvement. These restrictions seem inevitable. Urban places are just too changeable and complex to be able to deal with everything, features that make them so endlessly fascinating and a challenge to understand.

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