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American Perceptions of German City Planning at the Turn of the Century

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INTRODUCTION

The German city in the late 1800's was a victim of many of the malaises that had struck earlier in the century in Britain and the United States. Rapid industrialization, improved transportation networks, and massive urbanization contributed to the creation of overcrowded, slum-like, disease-ridden cities throughout the nation. The long-admired medieval centers were increasingly prone to epidemics and destruction by fire. In a cultural-political sense, they were perceived by the ruling authorities as being corrupt, anti-volkisch and centers of the much feared socialist movement. For the greater part of the century, the city had been neglected by both the national and local governments. This lack of attention caused Nikolaus Pevsner to write that the German city was "the most urgent and comprehensive problem of the nineteenth century." Pevsner's view is valid until the last quarter of the century. At that time, increased attention was focused upon virtually all cities in the nation: indeed, by 1910, the American reformer Frederick C. Howe stated before the Second National Conference on City Planning that the Germans had built the "most wonderful cities in modern times." Howe was but one of many American planners who praised the German endeavors. The failure of this aesthetic orientation led many planners to investigate the methods and approaches of other nations in a quest for the answers that would lead to improvement. Foremost among these nations was Germany. Individuals and delegations made trip after trip to major cities in Germany to observe how their planning problems were met. The resulting reports from these visits were full of glowing tributes about the advances made and urged that many of the measures used in Germany be adapted to the American city. Ultimately, some measures were applied to the American practice.

Many historians have found that the roots of modern American planning can be traced, in part, to both England and Germany. The English contributions have been extensively analyzed and traced back to their first application. The contributions of the German experience, while having been recognized, have not been adequately studied in terms of their original application. Few historians have endeavored to analyze the nature of planning itself in Germany during this time. These historians have taken the planning experiences and abstracted such features as zoning, land-use controls, and land redistribution and have merely stated that these were developed in German cities and that they served as influences upon American planning development. These individual features only provide a glimpse of the total experience. They do not provide an accurate view of the conditions, events, policies, rationale, and approaches that were developed to improve the German city. Also, they do not provide a holistic picture of what these American experts saw when they journeyed there.
The lack of knowledge concerning the German planning milieu represents one of many missing links in the development of a comprehensive analysis of the roots of American city planning. Friedman and Hudson recently took note of these missing links when they wrote that there is a need to "go a great deal further in considering traditions of planning that have evolved under other ideologies, in other countries and in other times."  

The intent of this paper is to identify the relationship between American and German city planning during the period between 1890 and 1916 by examining and analyzing the nature of German planning, by reviewing American views towards German planning, by exploring the specific contributions of the German experience to American planning, and by assessing the long-range influence that resulted from this relationship. While the scope is German planning in general, several cities during this period offer the best examples of the experience. These include Berlin, Munich, Dusseldorf, Hamburg, Nurnberg and Essen. Perhaps the best planned of all German cities during this period was Frankfurt. More Americans praised the accomplishments of this city than any other. For this reason, Frankfurt will serve as the focal point of this paper.

The Nature of German Planning: Geometry and Art.

In the last decade of the nineteenth century, German planners divided into two schools of thought. One, represented by Reinhard Baumeister and Joseph Stübben, centered upon the development of the city from the standpoint of health, sanitation improvement, and traffic requirements. The other, led by Camillo Sitte, focused upon the city as an aesthetic-architectonic object.

The poor health of urban residents stimulated extensive efforts on the part of governments and institutions to improve the livability of the city. The ruling Junker militarists worried because urban men were far less fit for military duty than non-urban men. They also felt that poor living conditions were contributing to anti-government feelings. Mainly because of these political concerns, the government initiated national social-welfare programs and city-planning and health-improvement-enabling legislation. The military implications of these social policies were not lost on American observers. The American housing reformer, Frederick Ford, states that the concern with military needs was the key motivation in the participation of the national government in city planning. The urban planner Patrick Geddes expressed a similar theme:

To the German state, however, the city planning was merely a projection of the Kultur of might. Let there be good road systems and broad avenues in the cities—so that troops may move freely and artillery command all parts of the city, in case the people do not appreciate rule by Berlin.

The concern for improving the quality of urban life was also a motivating factor in the creation of the Association for the preservation of Public Health (1873). This organization was dedicated to the eradication of poor living conditions. As such, it was quite effective. Indeed, the German planner Joseph Brix noted that city-planning concerns during this period were of secondary importance to those of health improvement. The key personalities involved in these improvements were the engineer William Lindley and the German hygienist Max Pettenkoffer. Lindley was a major figure in the development of the Hamburg sewage system, which was so effective that it became a model for other cities throughout the nation. Pettenkoffer has been credited with advancing the cause of public health throughout the nation to the point that it was truly German—that is, the advancements made were far more sophisticated than in any other nation.

These health improvements were only one of the influences that helped force the German city into rigid patterns of development. Another sprang from the city-planning ideas of the traffic engineers. The engineers were extremely fascinated with planning
according to geometric principles. The most renowned proponents of this approach were Reinhard Baumeister and Joseph Stübben.

Baumeister was a practicing engineer, architect, and city planner. He advocated the development of cities based upon such technical conditions as traffic needs and infrastructural requirements. His major contributions to German city planning were his *Principles for Town Expansion*, written for the Association of German Architects and Engineers (Verband Deutscher Architekten- und Ingenieur-Vereine, 1874 and 1906), and his main work *Town Expansions Considered with Respect to Technology, Building Code and Economy*, 1876. The latter text was the most important technical guide to urban planning for 13 years and continued to be used until the beginning of World War I.

Stübben was also an architect and engineer. His niche in German planning history resulted from his work in Cologne, Poznan, and Aachen. Perhaps more importantly, he was the author of the first German equivalent of an encyclopedia of urban planning, *Handbuch des Städtebaues* (1890). Together these men provided a sound basis for planning that centered upon a quantitative and scientific (Wissenschaft) approach toward the meeting of safety, sanitation and health needs. Their contributions in the last decade of the nineteenth century were only matched by one other person—Camillo Sitte.

Camillo Sitte, an Austrian, became quickly renowned in Germany in 1889 as a result of his text Der Städtebau nach Seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen (Vienna, 1889). At a time when the health improvements, traffic concepts, and legal requirements resulted in increasingly rigid patterns of development, Sitte’s book served as a balancing counter influence. Sitte’s thrust was not towards traffic flow or the development of sewage systems. Rather, he focused upon concepts that were designed to improve the psychological and physiological well-being of future residents. His view of the city was both architectonic—a three-dimensional form—and architecturally oriented. His concepts spread rapidly throughout the nation, and his influence can be found in most large cities including Munich, Stuttgart, Altona, Aachen, Darmstadt, Dresden, and Karlsruhe. From the writing of his book in 1889 until World War I, his views on civic aesthetics and the city as an architectural form were the dominant influences on the planning of new sections of the cities.

Transcending the engineer-architect dichotomy noted above was a third form of city planning that was of great significance. This form centered upon legalistic, bureaucratic, and administrative procedures and controls. Beginning with the *Fluchtliniengesetz* (Prussian Lines Act of 1875), German city planning became increasingly legalized. In fact the American zoning expert Frank B. Williams called this act one of the most important legislative acts in the history of urban planning. He based his opinion on the fact that it was one of the first planning acts in Europe and that it served as a model for similar legislation in other German states. The act determined the height limits, site layout, and location of industrial centers; authorized the development of master plans; and established minimum structure, safety, and combustibility performance standards. This act provided the foundation for the land-use regulations of the 1890’s. However, from the time of its passage to the 1890’s, its contribution to planning was minimal. One reason for this was the recalcitrance of the bureaucracy: “until 1890 at least,” according to Michael Hugo-Brunt, “the building officials to whom the resolutions were directed and who administered the ordinances and did the planning, seem to have been impossibly bureaucratic, . . . . the era of enlightened city architects and far-sighted burgermeisters . . . . had not yet dawned.”

The bureaucratic machinations appeared to have been particularly severe in Berlin with both provincial and imperial administrators vying for position. The experience of the Englishman J. A. W. Carstens who endeavored to influence the Emperor to develop Berlin into the “first city on the Continent,” is exemplary. Comprehensive planning went far beyond the actual construction of buildings: “There were streets to be laid out and paved, trees to be planted, water and gaslight to be brought into the districts and communication by rail or horse-drawn cars to be secured.” With such a program, it was small wonder that Carstens had over-extended himself and “incurred stiff opposition from the narrow-minded Prussian bureaucracy, who sabotaged his plans at every step.”

The lack of attention by the government and obstacles to planning created by the bureaucrats caused Pevsner to comment that: “The city . . . . had been criminally neglected by the architects and by government as well.” Pevsner’s comments must be placed in a proper context. During the Bismarckian years, there is substantial evidence to support this claim. However, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, a new attitude began to develop, and the city received increased attention in assistance to city planning and social reform. Also, if the conditions noted by Pevsner were compared with other European nations, then the German experience would not have appeared so backward. Indeed, Catherine Bauer found that “German cities were not so chaotically constructed as those of other countries, and the flimsy shacks and alley slums common in other countries were the exception rather than the rule.”

The municipal powers of German cities were
quite broad. From the time of the powerful independent city states and the Stein Reforms of 1808, a strong tradition of home rule had evolved. This tradition included the right of the city to undertake any measures necessary to correct problems that it desired so long as the solutions were not in specific contravention of state and national law. There was also a strong basis of popular support and respect for the municipal administrators, as well as a belief among the citizenry that the city was obligated to endeavor to correct the problems affecting it.

**Governmental Response**

The initiatives of city government, despite the lack of expropriation enabling legislation, to endeavor to improve the housing situation through whatever means it could indicate a sense of responsiveness within the local municipal administrations. This relationship worked both ways: it was stimulated by the people and, in turn, it stimulated them. The planner William Dawson asserted that “the German regards his town as a living organism, whose development both deserves and needs to be controlled with the utmost care and thought.” Thus, when the ugliness and civic disharmony that accompanied industrialization disrupted the physical life style of the citizens and distorted the “naturally evolved” form of the city, protest arose and endeavors to solve these problems began. As Frederic Howe wrote: “It was an assertion of the right of the community to protect its life.” This attitude and approach towards the need to improve the urban environment was, in general, a trans-European phenomenon. The European context of urbanism, at this time, was set in a traditional culture which cities, over an evolutionary period of thousands of years, achieved a special position in fostering and housing civilization. Intrinsic to this traditional culture was the view of Peter Hall that: "Cities as ancient repositories of culture, should be protected from decay; that urbanity, in the strictest sense, is a virtue that should be preserved by the planner; that cities are organically related to the agricultural hinterlands around them and that this relationship should be preserved.”

The German response, in the context of Hall’s statement, was significant. City and municipal leaders had the backing of highly trained and skilled bureaucrats. The entire German municipal governing system of this period was summarized as being “professional” and “scientific”. Charles Mulford Robinson, an American exponent of the city beautiful movement, emphasized this point when he wrote: “The Burgermeister and his magistrates are the best experts procurable and the council of the latter does not pretend to be citizen-representative but is made up of honored, highly-paid, professional and permanent employees, trained to the work of city administration.” A remarkable dichotomy between the two approaches existed during this time and could be considered as a key to the development of strong planning controls in the German and weak controls in the American. Seymour Toll presents the differences in this way: “For one the city was an object of rapine, for the other, veneration. Corruption contrasted with duty. The American city was often governed by nothing more than a monumental crook, the German by nothing less than the most distinguished Burgner. One came to office expecting to take, the other to give.”

By the turn of the century, virtually every German city and large town was undertaking some form of municipal master planning. This fact was noted by Daniel Burnham who took a grand tour of Germany in 1901. He was greatly impressed: This city planning means something far deeper than the men shaping streets. It means that men have come to realize a universal thought. In America there are hundreds of city planning commissions, in Germany...I have been told there are two thousand. The idea has become universal and it is not an ephemeral thing: it means that the nations have come together in a line up to a certain standard of advancement.

While city planning was progressing in the United States, Burnham’s optimism seems to have been somewhat exaggerated. Also, many people saw “planning” as leading to infringement on the individual’s rights. In fact, in the United States, a mood to perceive strong individual rights could be noted in the Congress, courts, and financial community. In contrast, the German tradition, as characterized by Frederic C. Howe in 1915, strongly encouraged the collective will to predominate:

City planning is a recognition of the unity as well as the permanence of the city. It involves a subordination of the city to include the things men own as well as the men themselves and widens the idea of sovereignty so as to protect the community from him who abuses the right of prosperity as it now protects the community from him who abuses his personal freedom.

If one were to develop a scenario at the turn of the century comparing the existing zoning of Frankfurt and the possible zoning of New York, major differences in land-use concepts in the two settings become apparent. In Frankfurt, the form of the business district and residential areas had remained unchanged since they were first built. In New York, in the late nineteenth century alone, changes in land use quite frequently occurred. Residential areas became commercial and then industrial. In the United States during the twenty years before 1916, a “throw away” spirit precluded the establishment of strong land-use
controls. Ernst Freund, one of America’s most highly respected legal experts on zoning during this time, commented that it was virtually impossible for Americans to use these controls:

The development of the property of a neighborhood in this country is beyond the wit of men to foresee. It seems capricious and I don’t believe it is within the wisdom or the foresight of a city council to attempt to control development of that kind. If this observation is true, it is better that a districting power should not be given to a city at the present time.18

Yet, in spite of the powerful measures available to German planners, land speculation had placed a stranglehold on government, and high land costs served as a major barrier to development.

Expropriation for housing needs was not within the powers of the German city — perhaps the one weakness in their home-rule powers at that time. Also, the rise of industry, coupled with increased urbanization, was having a destructive effect on long-established residential areas. To overcome these problems, many cities began to develop land-use policies and protective legislation. In the forefront of this movement was Frankfurt-am-Main under the administration of Burgermeister Franz Adickes who took office in 1891.19

Adickes for many years had sought approval in the Prussian Landtag for a comprehensive set of expropriation and land-use control powers. The conservative powers continually rejected his petitions. Finally, he gained permission to use these powers in his own city. His administration developed three acts that served as models for municipalities throughout Germany and that, ultimately had an impact on foreign lands.

The three municipal acts were Zoning, the Increment Tax, and a land redistribution scheme commonly called the Lex Adickes (Lex meaning law, Adickes being the name of the creator of the law).

The Zoning Act (1891)

Although this act is credited as having been created by Adickes, it was developed with the assistance of Baumeister. The relationship between Adickes and Baumeister was quite strong and through their combined efforts, an effective form of zoning was developed for Frankfurt. In fact, Frankfurt was the first German city to employ the tool as part of a municipally sponsored master plan.20

The act called for the city to be developed into two subsections: the inner city and the outer city. The inner city, which included the medieval Altstadt, had been highly developed before zoning. However, a concerted effort was made to remove the few remain-
to influence the marketplace, the city did not have the extensive use of expropriation that existed in the United States. This was a key weakness of the German city planning in this period as well as a major reason for the development of a new law called the *Lex Adickes*.

**The Increment Tax (1903)**

The Increment Tax was designed to discourage land speculation, since the continually spiraling land costs made the construction of inexpensive working-class homes prohibitive. First used in the German colonial settlement of Kiao Chau in China in 1898, it later spread to two cities in Saxony and was used in Frankfurt beginning in 1903. Essentially the tax levied a sum payable to the city computed on the gain to the owner that accrued from the transfer or sale of land. A series of conditions and increases in amount due to the city were included depending upon how long the land had been held. A basic tax of 2% was levied against every change of ownership. The amount due over and above the base tax was based upon a graduated scale. The success of this tax in Frankfurt was so overwhelming that, within one year after it was established, 652 other German communities had passed similar legislation. The idea was even discussed before a Sub-Committee of the United States Congress in 1909.

![Plate Two: Part of The Frankfurt Ringstrasse.](image)

**The Lex Adickes**

Adickes' greatest achievement was the product of nine years' struggle in the Prussian *Landtag*. Beginning in 1893, he sought an act that would enable municipalities throughout Prussia to redistribute parcels according to the best interest of the city as related to its master plan. He was assisted in this task by a housing reform group called the *Verein Für Wohnungsreform* (Association for Housing Reform) that had urged imperial and state legislation to assist the communities in improving their living conditions. Adickes and the housing reformers pressed their case in the face of defeat after defeat. Finally, in 1902, the *Landtag* passed an act specifically for Frankfurt, which enabled the city to expropriate parcels for redistribution in accordance with its master plan. The act, although by no means unique, has received great attention in English literature and is considered to be a pioneering step in the development of planning law.

The *Lex Adickes* empowered the city to acquire privately owned land, rearrange it in accordance with the city plan, and redistribute it for development or redevelopment. Up to 40% of the land could be retained by the city, without compensation, for park or street purposes. The city had already endeavored to institute the ideas of the *Lex Adickes* on a voluntary basis during the time when Adickes was trying to obtain passage of the act. These transfers of land to the city, which involved over 250 acres, enabled the owners to reap increased property values and profits. The fact that a few recalcitrant non-volunteers had caused an elongated period of negotiation for the release of their properties was the critical reason for the administration's abandonment of voluntarism. Indeed the city planners gained other victories as a result of the act. These included:

1. The prohibition of poorly constructed buildings (from an uneconomic and unhygienic standpoint),
2. Improvement of existing structures,
3. Straightening out the streets,
4. Clearing away traffic difficulties,
5. Planning for consistent policies in future extensions of the city,
6. Enlarging the market for building lots and thwarting harmful speculation.

In the first ten years of the act's existence, 14 areas involving a total of 375 acres, 643 lots, and 149 owners, were involved in redistribution in Frankfurt. The American housing reformer Benjamin C. Marsh considered the act as being a key expedient in overcoming the German housing shortage. However, several criticisms were leveled against the act. Indeed,
the third advantage listed above, the correction of misshapen streets, would have been considered as a disadvantage by some German planners. This was particularly true of the followers of the Sitte-esque "architectonic" approach to city planning who advocated that "a freer type of planning, in which greater consideration could be shown for the existing conditions of the site for existing roadways and property boundaries, would render needless very much of the rearrangement of properties." The English Garden City advocate, Sir Gwilym Gibbon, noted that "the law was found to be too cumbersome and did not prove so useful as expected at Frankfurt or elsewhere either in its original form or as later modified."

Although one can support the point of view of Gibbon in a narrow applicative sense, the threat of the use of the act was still a large inducement to cooperate with the city's planning endeavors. Further, the act was not intended to be the ultimate tool of the city planners, but rather, the first of a comprehensive set of tools. Heinrich Roessler, Vice President of the Frankfurt City Council, made this point shortly after the acts passage. "The Lex Adickes is only a beginning, it gives the community the right to compel people, not to sell their land, but only to redistribute it. But we must obtain further legislation to enable the land to be used for the prevention of a house-famine."26

Perhaps the most important point in the act was that the city would obtain up to 40% of the land without compensation. This enabled the city to create municipal reserves of vacant land on its fringe, which resulted in further restraints against speculation.27

Problems and Conflict

The most pressing problems of the day centered upon improved working conditions, the need for social welfare programs, sanitation improvements, housing, and orderly and coordinated expansion. The national government had taken action on the first two problems. Also, large-scale sewage and water systems were being built across the nation. The most unique measures were created to deal with housing development and methods to control expansion.

In the major cities of Germany, the majority of city council seats were held by conservative property owners. These men relied on rental income for their wealth. Therefore, a degree of reticence existed on their part to pass legislation for publicly supported housing. With the increasing strength of the socialist movement, the inaction of the city councils soon led to bitter conflict between the landowners and the masses.

According to Robert Fife, writing at the beginning of the First World War, "the injection of party politics into city affairs, in spite of the view of the city as a business enterprise, has made the Rathaus . . . the scene of bitter strife." The Berlin experience even more clearly provides an example as to why housing reform legislation was not considered as being in the "best interest." The city council was controlled, in part, by the owners of the large, unhealthy tenement blocks. If a new supply of low-rent housing came on the market, then these men would not have as large a market for their units. The extent of their power could be noted by the fact that one-half of the seats on the city council were reserved for owners of houses even though they represented about 1% of the people! Through this system, the homeowners were able to prevent the construction of new low-cost, low-rent housing. This stranglehold on the housing market becomes quite clear when one considers the following trend in Berlin: in 1711 there were 14 people per house; in 1740, 17; in 1840, 49; and in 1915, 77. In 1900, 45% of all Frankfurt households consisted of one room.

Some cities, by 1890, had gained sufficient power to attempt to overcome these measures. In fact, national enabling legislation had been enacted that allowed cities to invest in limited-dividend housing cooperatives. In the next twenty-five years, over 50,000 units were built using this system.28

Praise

The element of the Frankfurt experience that was most interesting to American planning was zoning. In fact, the cauldron created by the Garden City principles of Ebenezer Howard, the zoning concepts of the Frankfurt experience, and the social welfare improvements inspired by the American social reformers were major stimuli in creating a new approach to city planning in this period.29

Among those praising the Frankfurt experience was Benjamin C. Marsh. He went so far as to rank Frankfurt as the ideal model for modern city planning. One of the most influential men active in American city planning during this period, Marsh toured the Continent seeking out examples of outstanding city planning work in 1907. Upon returning, he presented his findings to the New York Committee on Congestion of Population (CCP), an organization dedicated to arousing public support for improving tenement conditions in New York. The following year, upon completing a second trip to Europe, he wrote a privately published book entitled An Introduction to City Planning: Democracy's Challenge and the American City, a major section of which centered
upon an examination of Frankfurt. He concluded from his observations of that city that "the most important part of city planning as far as the future health of the city is concerned is the districting of the city into zones."30

One of Marsh's greatest contributions to city planning was his role in organizing the First National Conference on Planning. Working together with the financier Henry Morgenthau, then chairman of the New York CCP, Marsh gained congressional support for a conference in Washington on 21-22 May 1909 to discuss housing, traffic, recreation, and other planning problems. The forty-three participants included Speaker of the House Joseph Cannon, Frederick Howe, Jane Addams, George Ford, John Nolen, and Frederic Law Olmsted, Jr.

This conference marked the beginning of the city-planning profession as a national movement. It was at this conference, also, that the German advancements were first highlighted in a national forum. After Morgenthau spoke on the need for a system of zones, Olmsted followed with an analysis of his recent examination of the European experience. Themes such as "protection against the selfish minority," "stabilization of real estate values," and "prevention of spread and congestion" echoed throughout his talk. He also noted that Frankfurt was one of the most progressive and best-managed cities in Europe.31

Similar thoughts were echoed by other reformers and planners throughout the pre-World War I period. For example, Frederic C. Howe, writing in Scribners, Harper's, World's Work, and Hampton's, continually focused upon the greatness of the German city. His theme is perhaps best summarized in his statement that "I know of no cities in the modern world which compare to those which have arisen in Germany during the past twenty years." Toll has written that Howe had as much to do with fueling American interest in German planning as any other man in the period. The zoning lawyer Frank Williams also agreed with Howe and wrote that .... "the greatest measure of success in city planning has probably been attained by Germany." George B. Ford agreed, albeit begrudgingly, that Germany had founded city planning. However, he did not agree with their rationale. The Darwinian-oriented, militaristic concerns that motivated their city planning were not of the same humanitarian patina that stimulated Ford and his contemporaries.32

The English, too, looked to German planning. In 1904, Thomas Horsfall wrote a text entitled The Example of Germany as a supplement to T. R. Marr's Survey of Housing in Manchester and Salford. In this text he focused upon the outstanding advancements in low-income housing improvements, city-planning policy development, and land-control regulations that had occurred in Germany. Reynolds has written that Horsfall's work on Germany and presentation of German ideas before governmental officials in England represented one of the key stimuli in the development of English planning. As in America, delegations and individuals journeyed to Germany to observe the experience first hand. Among these were Professor Stanley Adshead, Sir Patrick Abercrombie, Sir Patrick Geddes, Sir Ebenezer Howard, Sir Raymond Unwin, and Thomas Adams. These men were far more objective and critical of the German experience than were their American counterparts. Nevertheless, the German influence was felt in Britain. Also, as these men wrote about the German experience, they disseminated knowledge about it across the Atlantic.33

On Zoning

There was considerable debate during this time concerning if the American people were ready for zoning. The coming of Boss Tweed and George Washington Plunkitt and similar types of officials across the United States had made a shambles of "good" government. While self-interest predominated in American urban centers, enlightened, scientifically derived, rational decisions were being made in the German cities. It was a classic case of American Jacksonian democracy contrasted with Prussian authoritarian-type efficiency. Ernst Freund felt it important to highlight the dichotomy for the German improvements were not a result of the institutionalization of law but rather resulted from the desire of the leadership to take corrective action. It was not so much a case of law and science as it was of lawyers and scientists:

In other words everything that has been done by the city of Frankfurt in that wonderful work of city improvement in which it has been engaged under the guidance of its wise and energetic mayor has been done by the exercise of authority and I think we can learn a great deal from that.34

The American planner, A. L. Brockway, upon analyzing the American condition thought differently:

Not until the man on the street becomes impressed with a higher respect for law in this country shall we make the advances in town planning that we expect to. The autocracy of the Imperial German government is a tremendous asset and the respect for law on the part of citizens of Germany . . . . is the thing that makes success possible. The great stumbling block in our country . . . is the question of public property, the fundamental rights of the private individual.35

Many Americans believed that the "rights of the individual" precluded the transferring of zoning concepts to the United States: "A man's land is a man's
Plate Three: *The Frankfurt Altstadt.* Built during Medieval times, it was unsanitary, prone to epidemics and holocausts and extremely crowded. Up to 1944, it was one of the best examples of Medieval town centers in existence. It was completely destroyed.

land," and governmental regulation was perceived as infringing upon the rights of property and privacy. Conservative court reactions to governmental interference, coupled with the Spenceresque “rugged individualism” so popular during this time, perpetuated the belief of these people. Nevertheless, German planning did serve as a focal point for American efforts concerning the creation of strong city planning controls.

The End of the Relationship

In view of the relationship between Germany and the United States that occurred in the remainder of the first half of the twentieth century, the use of German city planning efforts as a model seems almost unbelievable. Toll explained the relationship as follows:

“To understand it one must begin by indulging in a fiction, glancing backward to the early part of the century as if through an atmosphere unpolluted by two wars with Germany. Then he must connect for an adulation for things European which seemed to grip turn of the century Americans more powerfully than it does their modern counterparts. Having made the effort, he will find that early in the century, the German city occupied an extremely important role in American urban reform. In view of the virtual oblivion into which it has since fallen, that role now appears to be extraordinary.36

As World War I grew nearer, the view of our “friendly German cousins” gradually gave way to a view of the “Terrible Hun.”37 The persons who had praised German advances became increasingly quiet. Meeks noted this shift as follows:

A contributing factor was the persistent current of nationalism which increased in strength as the ominous year 1914 drew near. The architectural journals reflected this tendency: Whether they were published in Germany, England or the United States, the volume of foreign material included in them dwindled from a generous proportion in 1900 to a mere trickle in 1911.37

Still, in spite of the change in view, the seeds of the German experience were implanted into the American
planning milieu. Beginning with the New York City ordinance of 1916, zoning became increasingly sophisticated. By 1923, the United States Department of Commerce had created a Standard State Zoning Enabling Act. By 1930, hundreds of communities had implemented zoning ordinances. Zoning today has become, however deeply maligned, the planner’s strongest tool.

Epilogue

The modernist experimentation of the Frankfurt planning experience did not end with the coming of World War I. Following the war, in the late 1920’s, it became the greatest example of modernistic city planning in the world. International ideas, the design ethos of the Neue Sachlichkeit (new functionalism), a new Wohnkultur, and a strong tradition of popular support evolved to create a program which built 15,000 units of housing, schools, shops, recreation areas, and buildings in less than five years. Planners and architects throughout the world came to Frankfurt to observe the new types of planning in action. In time, because of its outstanding results, it was selected as the site of the first regular meeting of the International Congress of Modern Architecture. Also, the Frankfurt planners were so overwhelmed with requests for information that they established a school to teach the Frankfurt method. Finally, many planners and architects active in Frankfurt and elsewhere in Germany were forced to leave to leave in the Diaspora caused by the coming of National Socialism. Several of these men came to the United States and, ultimately, exercised a great direct degree of influence upon city planning as it is practiced today.

NOTES


2. See Mel Scott, American City Planning Since 1890 (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 123ff.


13. Pevaner, Sources of Modern Architecture, p. 194 and; Catherine Bauer, Modern Housing (Boston, 1934), pp. 270-271.


17. Frederic C. Howe, Modern City, p. 228.


38. See Ruth Diehl, Stadtplanung in Den Zwanziger Jahren (Frankfurt, 1974).