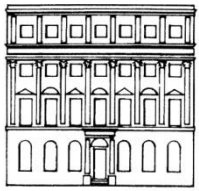
German Historical Institute
London



BULLETIN

ISSN 0269-8552

Valeska Huber:
Social Planning in Late Colonial and Postcolonial Societies (1920s–1960s)
Conference Report
German Historical Institute London Bulletin, Vol 35, No. 2
(November 2013), pp173-176

Social Planning in Late Colonial and Postcolonial Societies (1920s–1960s). Workshop organized by Valeska Huber and held at the German Historical Institute London, 30–31 May 2013.

'The modern world is a planned world', stated Sir Douglas Veale, Registrar at Oxford and an ex-civil servant, in which 'governments are bound to be more active and interfering than they have been in the past'. Civil servants, he continued, 'must be better instructed, and in particular must learn how to use experts and expert knowledge'.[1] The idea of planning, as expressed in this statement, gained prominence from the 1920s on and reached a climax in the 1950s and 1960s. Planning could, of course, refer to all kinds of domains, from urban layout to infrastructure, but also to entire societies or social phenomena, such as education, health policies, and so forth. Attempts at social planning could be small or large scale; they could be experimental, utopian, or contain practical policy recommendations. While planning is an important paradigm in the contemporary history of Europe and has been fruitfully explored in German and British *Zeitgeschichte*, it has resonated to a lesser extent in colonial and postcolonial history.

The workshop brought together experts on specific regions in order to draw comparisons between late colonial and postcolonial planning experiments, and between different regional configurations. The contributions adopted wide-ranging methodologies towards planning, from the history of ideas to the history of practices, actors, or materialities, highlighting that planning could carry different meanings and implications, and could come with radical or pragmatic political outlooks. Planning as idea and practice was sketched in papers on critics of economic and social planning (Quinn Slobodian, Wellesley College) and on the development of settlement and land reclamation schemes in the Netherlands (Liesbeth van de Grift, Nijmegen). Economic thinkers such as Moritz J. Bonn, Friedrich Hayek, and Lionel Robbins, developed powerful critiques of planning on different grounds, of which the most pervading was, of course, its

The full conference programme can be found under Events and Conferences on the GHIL's website <www.ghil.ac.uk>.

[1] Oxford University Archives, UR 6/Col/16. file 1, Brief for the Vice-Chancellor, 1 Aug. 1953. Quoted by courtesy of Sarah Stockwell (King's College London) with permission of the OUA.

regulatory and possibly totalitarian streak, connected to fascist or Communist regimes. Yet an analysis of the practices of planning, for instance, in the case of land reclamation and settlement schemes in the Netherlands, shows that many experts in the interwar period did not see planning and democracy as mutually exclusive, something that American commentators of the 1920s and 1930s equally stressed.

The distinction between pragmatic and radically transformative social planning also came up in other domains, such as in the example of agricultural cooperatives in pre- and post-independence India (Corinna Unger, Jacobs University Bremen). This connected the different phases explored during the workshop and illustrated the intricacies of transfer, entanglement, and comparison. The export of European models was, of course, neither straightforward nor unilinear. In the case of cooperatives, German models, such as Raiffeisen, were seen as particularly suitable for changing the behaviour of individuals while at the same time providing a vision of return to 'traditional' life, anti-urbanization, and the transformation of the social fabric without revolution.

The question of tradition and transformation in small-scale settlements was also at the centre of papers on village schemes in late colonial Angola (Samuel Coghe, European University Institute Florence) and Kenya and Algeria (Moritz Feichtinger, University of Berne). In the example of Angola, model villages were envisaged from the 1920s on, highlighting inter- and intra-imperial borrowing and combining medical, agricultural, and demographic planning. As in the case of Indian cooperatives, the planners saw a rural future for Angola as an answer to anxieties about depopulation and labour. While these plans were often not implemented, in the case of the Algerian and Kenyan wars of the 1950s, villagization and forced relocation schemes were devised in order to counter insurgency, but also, as stated in connection with Algerian society, to 'effect in a few months a major social revolution that has taken 500 years or more to achieve in England'. The very different village schemes clearly brought to the fore the tension between modernization and 'traditional life', but also between the plan as (often unrealized) vision and as *ex post* justification of violent social transformation.

What happens when planning translates into reality was assessed in the case of housing projects in the French *département d'outre-mer* La Réunion (Heloise Finch-Boyer, National Maritime Museum Lon-

don). Here, social planning as theoretical and top-down idea was most thoroughly deconstructed through an emphasis on the bureaucracy and materiality of planning, that is, the use of new materials such as concrete or artefacts such as maps. The example made clear how social planning schemes devised in metropolitan France were subverted once they reached local government and bureaucracies, but also how they were adapted by inhabitants through the unexpected use of the new structures and material.

The village and urban planning schemes also triggered debates regarding the scale of planning and the units of social transformation. While the economic thinkers of the interwar period mentioned above had judged that political constructs such as the 'world federation' envisaged by Lionel Robbins were 'too big to plan', other late colonial and postcolonial planners did not shy away from at least nationwide planning. Development plans such as de Gaulle's Constantine Plan of 1958 for Algeria again brought the tension between vision and implementation to the fore. Often interpreted as an attempt to save France's empire, Muriam Haleh Davis (New York University) interpreted it in relation to the emerging EEC and as closely connecting France's 'modernization' and Algeria's 'development', pointing to the competition between the two, for example, in the field of agriculture. The Constantine Plan furthermore illustrated the myriad of actors involved in drawing up a plan. Most of them shared the belief that Islam was central to the question of how Algerian Muslims could be made into producers and consumers, and thus into 'citizens of the twentieth century'.

Large-scale planning became one of the symbols of decolonization with many of the newly decolonized countries adopting five- or ten-year plans aiming at economic growth and social reconstruction. These plans again point to transfer and circulation between the 'first', 'second', and 'third worlds', as such plans were drawn up not only in the Soviet Union or the GDR, but also in India, Nigeria, and many other countries. In the case of Egypt (Valeska Huber, German Historical Institute London), educational and manpower planning came to be seen as particularly crucial for economic take-off. Early computing devices and statistics became central tools for the elaborate manpower projections needed for such planning. They were used to make change visible, transform visions into numbers, and suggest certainty and predictability. These techniques point to the very spe-

cific forms of expertise that planners had to operate in the 1950s and 1960s.

The role of experts was a recurring theme throughout the workshop. How politicians and social scientists, engineers, or doctors interacted proved a complicated matter in the different contexts. The post-war decades saw the emergence of a more standardized circulation of experts and expertise, for instance, through the introduction of development courses at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford (Sarah Stockwell, King's College London). Their analysis can show how the languages of cooperation and development entered the field and how British ideas of governance and plans for decolonization in particular were to be diffused. Through such training courses, but also in international organizations such as the International Institute of Educational Planning and other UN or UNESCO affiliated agencies, certain languages of development were crafted and circulated. Often these were couched in time metaphors such as those encountered in the context of Algeria.

In his conclusion, Frederick Cooper (New York University) not only brought his insight to all individual papers, but also came back to central questions regarding development and its periodization. He stressed the decade of the 1940s as crucial in the unfolding of development thinking in French and British colonial and in international contexts (for instance, the International Labour Organization). He thus connected the two periods covered in the workshop, namely, the 1920s–30s and the 1950s–60s. Cooper also reflected on the complicated definitions of social planning, describing it as a defensive movement aspiring to ease political radicalization, yet often actually creating it. With its aim of generating predictable, measurable outcomes, an aim that clearly set planning apart from other forms of interference, for instance, in the name of the civilizing mission, it presumed a high degree of local knowledge, which was very often not disposable in late colonial contexts. Leading on from this, the concluding discussion orbited around the question of planning and knowledge management and the creation (or fiction) of certainty through statistics and other tools.

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