Invented Edens: Techno-cities of the Twentieth Century

The 20th century saw the birth of the professional disciplines of urban and regional planning, and the associated construction of myriad New Towns. Often, the construction of these new urban centres was central to the expression, in urban form, of wider ideological and socio-political movements. This was especially the case in those ideological landscapes where technology and the political blended (un)easily in the production not only of urban environments, but in projects aimed at fashioning new model citizens (as fascist Italy or Nazi Germany) and new societies (as in the USSR). However, the central role of technology in the imagination of society through the built metaphor of the city is not limited to authoritarian regimes, and extends to the present day: witness Tsukuba in Japan, the United Kingdom's New Towns, or the race – in the Gulf and East Asia – to build ever more complex eco-cities. In their book, Kargon and Molella attempt to redefine New Towns as 'techno-cities' by focusing on the central role of technology in planning.

Kargon and Molella tackle a broad historical landscape: they set 'techno-cities' within a historical framework which sees their birth with the Garden City ideal and their end in the development of techno-hubs, such as Tsukuba or Silicon Valley, and other new urban forms at the end of the century. The authors define 'techno-cities' as 'cities planned and developed in conjunction with large technological or industrial projects' (p. 1). The book also identifies techno-cities as rooted, at a deeper level, in utopian thought and in 19th-century paternalist company towns. Techno-cities are described, furthermore, as 'purpose-driven' settlements which embody a sort of 'techno-nostalgia' (p. 3), defined by the authors as a yearning to reconcile the positive aspects of imagined pre-modern rural idylls with the material benefits of modern technologies in a new vision of the city.

The book's focus is on case studies – from garden cities to urban design in fascist Italy – which have, in the main, received consistent attention from scholars. However, they claim to analyse these urban settlements in 'a new and useful framework, bringing the perspectives of intellectual history and the history of technology into the story' (p. 2). Kargon and Molella seek to explain and analyse how the modern, material world of technology and industry became integrated into urban life in the 20th century. In particular, they claim that 'The vast literature on Garden Cities, planned decentralization, and alternative towns slights the important role that new technologies […] played in their plans' (p. 4). The authors assert that such technologies were crucial and central to these new urban areas.

The first chapter traces the roots and early ramifications of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City concept, and is one of the book's strongest chapters. The influence of Edward Bellamy and other utopian writers on Howard's ideas are chronicled, usefully focusing on the 'escape of invention', the spread of the Garden city innovation from Howard's writings to wider support and appeal. The chapter introduces other key figures – chief among them Geddes and Mumford – who would take the Garden City idea and run with it, enabling it to have a crucial impact beyond British planning. The second chapter continues with the broad historical linearity of the book, and analyzes the inter-war years, tracking the spread of Garden City ideals in Russia, mainly after 1918, in a discussion linking city planning to broader debates around building the ideal socialist state. The chapter is introduced clearly but briefly: this means that some key points and contextual cases are described almost in passing, and risk coming across as superficial. For example, the building of the key Soviet towns of Magnitogorsk and Stalingrad – arguably magnificent 'techno-city' examples – are described in just one paragraph (p. 22). Instead, the chapter's focus quickly moves from the Soviet Union to the more familiar (for tha authors) territory of Norris, Tennessee, and Salzgitter, in Germany. These two cases are somewhat underdeveloped, especially that of Salzgitter, which is rushed. Furthermore, by focusing on two examples described essentially as failures, the authors overshadow the fact that 'successful' New Towns built to completion in the 1930s – such as fascist New Towns in the Pontine Marshes – arguably outnumbered those which can be classed as failed.

In the third chapter, Kargon and Molella outline the planning of Torviscosa, a public-private New Town development in 1930s Italy. This is a good case study choice – Torviscosa is an exciting but oft-overlooked town in the wide literature on fascist urban planning. While the founding ideals and changes in the development of Torviscosa (and its relationship with fascism) are touched upon, at times the chapter replicates rather than critically engages with fascist propaganda discourse on New Towns: 'Where Caesars had fallen short […], Il Duce prevailed' (p. 30). Furthremore, there are some inaccuracies in the chapter; for example, the fascist New Town devoted to coal production was not commonly referred to as 'La Città del Carbone', but as Carbonia; the New Town devoted to the air force was referred to from the start as Guidonia – a name supposedly chosen by Mussolini – rather than as the 'Città dell'Aeronautica', a title which was used descriptively.

Oak Ridge, Tennessee, is the focus of the book's fourth chapter, and Molella has previously written about the city. Oak Ridge was one of three 'Atomic Cities' (Los Alamos being the best-known example) built during the Second World War in the United States, and dedicated to the Manhattan Project. The chapter usefully links planning and the central role of the city's productive aims to the nuclear project in the US, and the shadow which the Bomb cast on urban planning. Chapter five attempts to bridge the fissure in planning ideals and ideologies catalysed by the Second World War; this is done through analysis of the case of regional planning in Valle d'Aosta, Italy, and in particular the case of Ivrea, a New Town dominated by the Olivetti Company. Kargon and Molella display, yet again, one of the book's narrative strengths in charting the influence of wider European and North American planning currents on Adriano Olivetti, the key motivator behind the Ivrea project.

The sixth chapter presents the highly engaging, fascinating case of the planning of Ciudad Guyana, Venezuela, in the 1960s. The story is about how a motley team of urban planners, architects and social scientists collaborated, under an MIT-Harvard banner, in the envisioning and construction of a new urban

centre, Ciudad Guyana. The chapter also presents, perhaps unwittingly, a cautionary tale in the top-down planning of new urban settlements by professionals far removed from the local context. Perhaps the best assessment of the inevitable rifts and fractures which divided the planning team almost from the start was given by Lisa Peattie, a lone anthropologist on the planning team, and one of the few team members who actually bothered to *live* in Ciudad Guyana: she aptly described conflicts over the future shape of the city as the 'Platonic city versus the Aristotelian city' (p. 121), ergo the disembodied Plan, 'visualized most clearly in diagrams … and architectural renderings' (p. 121) versus a vision of the city as a socio-political human environment.

The book ends with a study of Celebration, a Florida town linked to the animation industry and described rather hastily by the authors as an appropriate concluding study: 'it is not surprising that a fantasy city in support of the new industry of animation becomes the ultimate techno-city' (p. 5). Celebration, a New Town inaugurated in 1996 by the Walt Disney World Company, is analyzed in planning as well as marketing terms, and particular emphasis is placed on the embedding of networks of technology within the town as opposed to displaying technologies prominently, as advocated by the visions of Buckminster Fuller and other modernist planners. This example of 'techno-nostalgia' – a creepy superimposing of Main Street small-town ideals onto a technological framework exemplified by EPCOT and, more tangibly, fibreoptic networks – signals a more intimate blending of technology with the market, whilst retaining the central industrial purpose around which most planned New Towns revolved. Indeed, the authors claim that with its central focus around the entertainment industry, Celebration 'is as much an industrial city as Ivrea, Italy, or Gary, Indiana' (p. 131).

One of the book's most positive aspects is that it is written clearly and engagingly, and does not get stuck in theory (although this may also represent a weakness for audiences who may want to get to grips with issues and contexts which ramify from planning into wider social, historical and ideological debates). The way the book is written will make its appeal broad; it speaks both to scholars *and* the wider public. However, this also opens up *Invented Edens* to a broader critique of treading too lightly on case studies which could have been developed more fully, with more attention paid to significant current debates which have tried to position similar cases within wider analytical frameworks. For example, the authors claim that technology was often seen as an integral part of the amelioration of the city, such that 'Rural isolation, urban congestion, disease, and separation from nature would be greatly reduced or even eliminated. The amelioration of human nature follows from the betterment of the environment' (p. 4). This is a recurring theme in the book: the interplay between city and nature, between technology and environment, and between all the above and *human* nature. And yet, the authors choose not to draw on the wide body of literature which (in political ecology and beyond) attempts to theorise and tackle precisely these intersections of society, technology and nature in the city. Had Kargon and Molella engaged with these ideas, the book would have had stronger theoretical import as a result; as it stands, a lack of engagement with theories on the interaction between nature and society seems to stem more from the book's limited bibliography than a real lack of published sources on these issues. On a different level, apart from the case study of Ciudad Guyana, most examples used in the book are Western cases; and even in the example of Ciudad Guyana, part of the focus lies on its planning by a joint team of planners predominantly working from a North American context. More examples from outside a US and Europe-centric sphere would have been welcome.

The authors' conclusion claims that 'the techno-city experiment had largely run its course by 2000' (p. 155) and that the emphasis has now shifted to 'technopoles' such as Silicon Valley, technology corridors, edge cities and 'science cities' such as Tsukuba in Japan. These cities, according the authors, 'can be dynamic and economically, robust, but they are devoid of utopian impulse and increasingly immersed in their own urban problems' (p. 156). This seems to be somewhat backward-looking, and this particular reviewer would argue that Tsukuba and Silicon Valley are not the future, but the 'new cities' of the 1980s and 1990s. Rather, the 'techno-city' mantle has been passed on to centrally planned public-private 'eco-city' developments such as Dongtan, China, or Masdar, in Abu Dhabi. These new, well-funded and possibly technologically groundbreaking and innovative settlements clearly manifest utopian planning ideals and a reliance on (environmentally friendly) advanced technologies; they also manifest the conflicts, inequalities and

problems which plagues many earlier New Towns. The 'techno-city', it would seem, is alive and well.

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