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An Irregular publication for members of the Town Planning Research Group (not for general publication or republication)

(Note: Enclosed for those who have not yet received it is a copy of "Catalyst" which largely reproduces "Housing Survival in Carlton", the report of the Carlton Association to the Minister of Housing.)

This issue: Ideas from Overseas. (Reviews by "Gamma")

1. Soviet Union: Planning Controversies.
2. United Kingdom: Public Participation in Planning.
1. Soviet Union: PLANNING CONTROVERSIES (by "Gamma")

A recent series of articles in the "Soviet Weekly" magazines have had the following titles:

"Designing Tomorrow's Towns Today", "Averting the Menace of Megalopolis", "Cities, Horizontal or Vertical", "Who Threatens the Land", "Must Cities be Big and Bad."

The breadth of the discussion on Town Planning can be gauged from the following quotes from these articles. I have endeavoured to select quotes credited to Soviet citizens who have some qualifications to be spokesmen on town planning problems. The articles were published from March 8th to April 5th of this year and the magazines are still available at bookshops that sell literature from the Soviet Union.

1/26/9 Transport and Micro-districts.

M. Sukholutsky, a Kiev design engineer, has been studying the problem of municipal transport for twenty years. "Poll after poll has confirmed", he says, "that comfortable public transport, handiness for place of work, and to shops and social centres, these are what really makes a city pleasant to live in."

"Until recently, the concept of the 'microdistrict'.... a self contained 'neighbourhood' independent of (and a long way from) the city centre, reigned supreme among Soviet town planners."

"The putting of this theory into practice resulted in blotched cities...and high maintenance costs."

"Now it is clear that the weight given to this idea was unjustified. The disadvantage of such 'neighbourhoods' are cancelled out by the transport problems they cause" "To get nearer to the centre most people are ready to exchange their flats for smaller ones and to sacrifice all kinds of advantages."

"Theatres, museums, exhibitions, restaurants, big libraries, and institutes are concentrated in the centre of course."

"No matter how hard we work improving the suburbs, the appeal of the centre will not get anyweaker," says Sukholustky.

2/26/9 Monotony and Module Building.

G. Asaris, Deputy Chief Architect of Riga, urges co-ordination of building work and building finance and complains:

"Sometimes in the pursuit of quantity we lose quality, not only in separate blocks but of whole neighbourhoods, you get residential districts in different towns that you can't tell apart."

He advocates that the whole technology of house buildings must become more flexible, and that "there needs to be standardisation not of whole houses (flats) but of 'module' flats which can be assembled and grouped together in umpteen different ways."

He explains that "moreover 'module' building allows greater elasticity, there is no reason why at least some flats in every block should not be deliberately constructed so as to allow them to expand."

3/26/9 Community Facilities.

G. Asaris also joins in the criticism of "failures to plan community buildings....centres of population with all the shops, cinemas schools and other amenities they need."

"Everybody agrees with the principle, but in practice it is too often disregarded."

N. Osterman a Moscow architect, enters into the same discussion when he writes:

"One of the standard grouses is that the home building programme has outstripped the provision of services. We are doing our best to reduce the lag by a more commonsense approach."

"We have for instance been in the habit of building new sports halls big enough for 20,000 people. On any scientific basis, that ought to be nearer 2,000 to 2,500. This would bring sports facilities to everybody on a housing estate."

"It is a question of providing a complete environment....and here our sociologists have fallen short."

"A block of flats is a world in miniature, in which everything ties, or should tie up....world of man and things."

"We need more consumer research. Should architects be providing more sheds, cupboards, and such like auxiliaries to a home as is often advocated."

N. Osterman pointed out that as the working week was being shortened people would have more time for leisure, and the architects have the responsibility of designing social facilities for these new conditions. He said that in new projects such facilities can be planned from the start, but in the older blocks it was necessary to make adaption and to convert parts of blocks of flats for clubrooms and libraries.

4/26/9 A Vast Conurbation.

Oleg Pchelintsev, a research associate of the Academy of Sciences Institute of Economy campaigns against those who would "return" to small and medium "optimum" towns as a way out of the "big city crisis."

He says "there is nothing 'optimum' about existing medium-sized towns, so you can't return to them."

He explains that with the present high levels of modern transport and communication it is possible to concentrate industry and population in vast conurbations, of which the city proper is only the core. A feature of conurbation is the separation of residential from industrial areas, and the consequent "commuter problem"....though traffic is rarely as congested as in large and medium sized "unified" towns.

Another Economist V. Perevedentsev says:

"Most of the charges brought against super-cities do not hold water, Statistics show that productivity in cities is ~~stringly~~ ^{strikingly} proportionate to their size".

"In cities of a million it is 38 per cent higher than in those of 100,000 to 500,000."

As regards people he says: "Today people have more leisure and the more free time they have the more attractive the big city is."

5/26/9 Control City Growth.

Other Soviet writers however, advocate stricter controls to prevent cities growing too big; for example in a book reviewed in "Soviet Weekly". "Urban Population Centres in the U.S.S.R."

B. Khorev advocates "a complete ban in large cities on any new factories or city-forming facilities not related to their needs."

And S. Divilor of the Azerbaijan State Planning Committee strongly criticises planning organisations for concentrating industry in large cities. He advocates restriction of industrial building in big cities and incentives to encourage industry to small towns. The incentives he recommends are housing, schools, other facilities to local Council, tax exemption on goods produced.

6/26/9 Conservation.

Professor Lyashchenko head of the Architecture Department of the All Union Polytechnic states that in the 21st century the Soviet population will reach 450 million and he proves by statistics that to house all these people will only take up one half of one per cent of the country's territory. He then explains:

"Land shortage due to over-population is therefor no threat to mankind". but he adds "land shortage is a real threat; not from housing programs but from industrial construction."

"Industry is demanding more and more territory all the time. Land requirement for dwelling and public service buildings can be estimated more or less accurately, but industrial requirement are much more difficult to predict."

"In the old days, a miner would dig up a couple of cubic yards of rock a day. An excavator can now dig out a good 3,000 cubic yards an hour."

And he advocates some imaginative ways of coping with this problem. "New technologies should be introduced more steadily; vertical layout areas, underground construction and so on. The absence of scientifically based forecasting for the whole complex of industrial development cannot be tolerated any longer."

"Where science is not allowed a free say, a free hand is given to superficial and one-sided views, hasty projects and strictly administrative approaches."

"Research should be started into new industrial architecture, based on the achievements of modern scientific and technological revolution."

"Factories, unlike the present-day ones, should soar skywards or burrow deep underground. They should be factories which do not contaminate the air and water."

"The difficulties of solving these problems lies not so much in their intrinsic complexity, as in the lack of realisation by so many that they are urgent."

7/26/9 Construction of Housing.

There is an interesting comparison in one of the articles between flat projects in Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev. The Moscow flats have been built and the other two are at the design stage.

Here are some quotes about these projects:

"The buildings will differ, but their architects agree on one thing...the home of the future must relieve its residents of labour consuming and burdensome chores." "All three complexes will have restaurants and other meal services."

"All group auxiliary premises on the ground floor and in separate blocks"

The illustrations and descriptions of these three projects do not indicate any innovation in construction. However, in other articles some futuristic concepts are advocated.

For example Architect Loktev has designed a building of "mobile elements" "Levers and platforms mounted on a giant frame support whole districts, which can move upwards, downwards, or sideways. Transport is not merely on a horizontal plane, but also vertical and diagonal."

"The whole thing is based on a giant skeleton in which "cells" are mounted, each cell being a block of houses, a theatre, etc, movable at will."

"This calls for the erection of a central 'trunk' from which building clusters will be built down in the form of triangular wings or cones. All flats will be entirely pre-fabricated and assembled on the trunk, and will be replacable like parts of a machine."

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"At the foot of these giants will be parks, boulevards, and stadiums." And N. Osterman (previously quoted on community facilities) also has this to say:

"My own idea of the town of the future is one raised in the air with stairways and lifts concealed in the pillars on which the houses are built. The blocks would be 30 to 40 storeys high, starting thirty to forty feet above ground. The space below the blocks could be used for gardens, greenery and swimming pools. The dwellings could have window boxes, hanging gardens (decks) and every bit of sunlight."

8/26/9 Domestic Amenities.

In the article dealing with the housing projects at Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev, there is considerable argument about the extent to which co-operative servicing should be developed.

"All three complexes will have restaurants and other meal services to save the tenants the trouble of cooking and doing kitchen work in general."

"There are therefore no kitchens in the Moscow flats. They have instead a tiny kitchenette, with electric cooker, fridge, sink, working surface and a wall mounted dish cabinet with a drying rack. Those who wish may cook there, or heat up meals taken from the dining-room. The kitchenette can be screened by sliding panels."

"The Kiev architects disagree with their Moscow colleagues on this point. In their view, the tenants should be relieved of most labour consuming kitchen jobs but not of the kitchen itself. In their design, they have provided for a kitchen-dining room separated from the living room by a removable concertina partition."

There is argument, too, on the extent to which, communal halls play-rooms libraries, health clinics, and other similar facilities should be developed as part of the flats.

The Moscow flats are equipped with a long list of hobby rooms, theatres, loggias, reading-rooms, workshops, sauna baths, and so on. After listing these the article then states:

"Georgi Platonov, head of the Leningrad project, points out that you don't go to the cinema or club every night, and that an average person does not fall ill very often."

"There is no point therefore he says in making health centres, cinemas clubrooms part of the complex."

"The Leningraders, therefore, have only everyday services in their project."

"The Kiev architects combine the health centre, manned by a therapist a dentist, and a paediatrician...with a gym. Their club is only four rooms, and their social centre is a separate building so that nothing should disturb the quiet in the flats."

Note...the flats discussed in this article vary in size, the Moscow block is 812 flats of which 138 are for families of three or four, 430 for families of two or three, 214 for single persons or couples, and 30 for single persons. (Thus about 1800 or 2000 people would be housed in the complex).

N. Osterman, the Architect mainly responsible for the Moscow flats has written, in another one of the articles:

"Long ago we thought of communal houses as a means of transforming our way of living...though of course, only one means."

"In the West, some people see architecture as a way of solving the social difficulties of a community"

"Le Corbusier said we should regard the house as a "machine for living". We pay attention to those views, but do not entirely agree."

"Communal housing experiments have had their day. But though mistakes were made, the basic contention is still worth considering; the social purpose of housing."

9/26/9 Preservation of Historic Buildings.

This brief article is reproduced in full.

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"Another 'open-air museum' of traditional Russian buildings is being assembled in the village of Ostrovsky near Leningrad."

"It will bring together some 150 fine old wooden churches, keeps, mills and houses many beautifully carved and decorated."

"In the Middle Ages churches, in these parts were fashioned entirely with axes, without the use of nails."

"One of the finest is the Church of St. George, built on a lake-side in 1493."

"Another exhibit is a real 'fairy tale' windmill built about two centuries ago."

The buildings are being dismantled log by log, treated with anti-rot solution and reassembled on the new site.

10/26/9 To give the above quotations some perspective here are some vital statistics, also quoted from the series of articles in the "Soviet Weekly."

"The war left 25 million in our country homeless, so there was no question of whether to build swimming baths or homes. It has to be homes, homes, and more homes."

"Moscow's population is now 6½ million."

"Between 1926 and 1966 the number of towns in the U.S.S.R. grew 2½ times over. But the population of the really big cities grew nearly six times."

"In 1961 the urban population overtook the rural for the first time."

"In ten years 1959-69 over 800 new towns sprung up, but the bulk of the increase in urban population....26 million....was in the older cities. The larger they were the more they expanded. First Moscow, then Leningrad, then Kiev then Tashkent."

When a Moscow school girl was asked the definition of a "landowner" she said "my grandfather is a landowner, because he has potplants on his balcony."!!

2. United Kingdom; PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN PLANNING

11/26/9 People and Planning: is the title of a report which has been published this year, by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government of the United Kingdom. (Obtainable from Her Majesty's Stationary Office (H.M.S.O) Price 15/- sterling.)

This report is the result of a years work by a Committee appointed in March 1968 "to consider and report on the best methods, including publicity, of securing the participation of the public at the formative stage in the making of development plans for their area."

The immediate task of the Committee was to suggest practical ways in which local planning authorities could best implement the relevant parts of the new Town and Country Planning Act, thus enabling people to contribute ideas while plans are being prepared for the area in which they live.

Chapter V. "Techniques for participation and publicity" has the following introductory paragraph.

"We have looked for ways in which two main groups of the community may make a constructive response" (to participation in planning "Gamma".) "They are, first, the active minority who take part in influencing community affairs, and second, the passive, who although deeply affected by decisions, do not make their voices heard, because of diffidence, apathy or ignorance of what is going on. Into the active group fall those who normally join local organisations."

12/26/9 Local Forum;

Then follows some ideas on how a local forum might provide a bridge between groups and the authority and a useful link between groups themselves. It is explained....

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"We have set out the arguments" (for the Forum . . . "Gamma") " at some length because the idea has been little tested in practice and because it carries risks. We do not put it forward as a recommendation to be adopted everywhere, not in a rigid form."

Several ideas are put forward on how such a forum could be initiated. "The initiative for convening a community forum could come from the local planning authority, in partnership with district councils where possible," and in more detail it is stated:

"The authority would call a meeting of representatives of bodies such as churches, voluntary social organisations, civic and amenity societies, residents and tenants associations, trade unions, political parties, chamber of trades, youth and other organisations interested in working in the community."

Four functions of the local forum are listed:

1. To receive information on proposals from local planning authority.
2. To provide the opportunity for discussion by all means including exhibitions and films.
3. To present the views of the constituent organisations to the planning authority.
4. To continue a dialogue with the authority through-out the plan-making process.

13/26/9. Involvement by Activities

Under this heading we read:

"We believe strongly in participation by activities. The public are far more likely to make representations and feel that they have contributed if they have undertaken some of the activities involved in processes of publicity and participation. We suggest for example, that:

1. Societies and individuals should be involved in arranging meetings and organising publicity.
2. Societies could assist in some survey work.
3. The public should help in arranging and staffing exhibitions which might be borrowed from the authority to help crystallise local opinion.
4. Public meetings and exhibitions should be used as occasions for participation.
5. Organisations should be invited to co-operate by distributing material both to their members and on a door to door basis.

14/26/9 Incentive to participate

The report stresses the need to implement plans as quickly as possible so that public interest is sustained. For example "where a local plan includes measures for improvement, for example by way of tree planting, which can be carried out in advance of the main proposals, that should be done. It may cost slightly more to implement proposals in this way, but it will show that planning and participation produce results. There will be little incentive to further participation if no result is seen for several years".

And the value of a positive example is recommended. . . "Demonstration of the beneficial results of participation should be used to stimulate activities in other areas. For example, we recommend that visits should be arranged to show to the inhabitants of areas which are to be improved, the effect of similar work in nearby areas or towns."

15/26/9

The Giving of Information

The best way to use press, radio and T.V. to publicise planning information is discussed. One particular idea is "we recommend that local planning authorities should consider providing facilities for the broadcasting of council debates on the big planning decisions, which are the legitimate concern of the community. These include, for example, the thrashing out of matters to be included in the structural plan. The more open the discussions and the wider the audience, the greater will be the sense of participation."

These few quotes will serve to give some ideas of the nature of this valuable official report. The sixty-nine pages of the book are not only packed with information, arguments, recommendation statistics and opinions, it is also well illustrated with sketches which not only make many pages more interesting, but also have the effect of acting as a decoy to ensnare the casual page-flipper into reading the text.

Our copy was sent to us by Rover No. 2. We thank him for this thoughtful donation to T.R.G.