

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/281811301>

# Norsk BOBY and transnational planning dialogue (1913–1945)

CONFERENCE PAPER · NOVEMBER 2013

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.1.3423.5361

---

READS

2

1 AUTHOR:



Michel Geertse

10 PUBLICATIONS 0 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

## Norsk BOBY and transnational planning dialogue (1913-1945)<sup>1</sup>

Michel Geertse

### Transnational planning dialogue

Following the “transnational turn” in the humanities and the social sciences in recent years architectural historians and planning historians have sought to refine their perception of twentieth century (town and country) planning by looking beyond biographies of individual planning pioneers and their achievements and situating their objects of research in transnational frameworks. Planning history increasingly is perceived as a history of migration and circulation of individuals and ideas through global networks. Throughout the twentieth century town planners exchanged ideas and experiences which were imitated and emulated. This trade was facilitated by a transnational networked planning society, embedded in international organizations, congresses, competitions, exhibitions, periodicals, et cetera, which Pierre Yves Saunier has dubbed the “Urban Internationale.”<sup>1</sup>

The transnational turn in planning history has sparked substantial academic interest in the International Federation for Housing and Planning (hereafter the Federation), an organization that was, and still is, at the heart of the Urban Internationale. This organization has been installing and regulating the international political economy of planning ideas for a century now. The impact of the Federation on transnational planning dialogue is being contested in available literature. The steadily expanding audiences at its congresses clearly indicate that the Federation was one of the largest, if not *the* largest transnational platform for the discussion of housing and town planning issues in the interwar years, a position that was rapidly regained after the War. Some authors refer to the Federation as an outdated dinosaur insisting on decentralization to new settlements of cottages, while a growing group of housing and town planning officials and a new generation of rational (modernist) architects and planners favored high-rise inner-city development<sup>2</sup> or as an unwieldy and bureaucratic organization unable to transcend the mere collection and dissemination of available knowledge.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Stephen Ward identifies the IFHTP as one of the main international platforms to disseminate the latest housing and planning ideas and experiences.<sup>4</sup> According to Gerd Albers the evolution of the program of the congresses of the IFHTP kept pace with the latest town planning reference books on national housing and town planning experiences.<sup>5</sup> This thesis is supported by planning historian Joel Outtes, who points out that the congresses of the IFHTP perfectly represent the developments in the field of housing and town planning.<sup>6</sup> Renzo Riboldazzi labels the body of ideas of the IFHTP as *un'altra modernità*, an alternative conception of modern housing and planning, that was very influential in the Inter-bellum period and that so far has been unjustly overshadowed by the conception of modernity by CIAM.<sup>7</sup>

Like so many of their foreign peers, Norwegian housing reformers and town planning

---

<sup>1</sup> Lecture presented at *Fra Reform til Refleksjon: Norsk Bolig- og Byplanforenings 100-Årskonferanse*, Oslo, Monday 18 November 2013.

militants joined the Federation to partake in the transnational planning dialogue facilitated by this international platform. Who were these Norwegians flocking to the Federation? The Federation was not a neutral stage where everybody could participate, nor was it a place where all ideas could be put forward. The Federation and the Urban Internationale at large represented a transnational sphere of symbolic power where individuals, organizations and institutions contested definitions of and actions upon the city. How did the Norwegians partake in this contested planning dialogue? And finally, how effective was this dialogue actually?

### **The Norwegian connection**

Who were the Norwegian members of the Federation? This seems a rather simple question, but there are no straightforward answers. The historical membership administration is lost, making it impossible to assess total Norwegian participation. The question is whether we need to assess total Norwegian membership. Although the congresses of the Federation eventually drew audiences of more than a thousand registered delegates, the nature and performance of the Federation was essentially defined by a relatively small population of active members that acted as officer and or held a seat in the executive or governing body of the Federation. This select elite decided upon issues and participants appropriate for the transnational planning dialogue in the Federation. These active members not necessarily corresponded with the prominent contributors at the congresses (tables 1 & 2).

Norway was the first Scandinavian country to provide active members, although it represented a relatively small national faction. Renzo Riboldazzi identifies Norwegian architect Sverre Pedersen (1882-1971) as prominent contributor to the congresses of the Federation between the wars.<sup>8</sup> This former city architect of Trondheim and town planning professor at the *Norges Tekniske Høgskole* (NTH) was well-known for his many town planning schemes. However, the foremost Norwegian spokesman in the Federation during the Inter-bellum was economist, town planner and prolific writer Christian Gierløff (1879-1962). Gierløff is well known as prime mover behind the Norwegian garden city movement, closely collaborating with Sverre Pedersen.<sup>9</sup> In 1915 he became secretary-general of *Norse Forening for Boligreformer* (the predecessor of Norse BOBY), a Norwegian housing reform association with an explicit orientation towards British garden city experience. He edited their magazine *Boligsak i By og Bygd* from 1916 to 1924 and its successor *Bolig og Bygg* from 1924 to 1934.

In the early spring of 1919 Gierløff travelled to London to acquaint himself with the progress in British town planning and housing. His first visit was to see Richard Reiss, chairman of the British Garden City and Town planning Association (GCTPA), at GCTPA headquarters, where also the Federation found its accommodation. There he witnessed an exciting telephone call from Hatfield. Ebenezer Howard had seen an ideal site for a new garden city for sale. Reiss should come and see. So Reiss and Gierløff caught the next train to Hatfield to explore the site. Reiss on the spot made up his mind. He immediately set out to

raise enough money for the rather high deposit at the auction, while Gierløff was content “to hand over to Howard on the spot a small note.” Gierløff was excited to witness “the birth

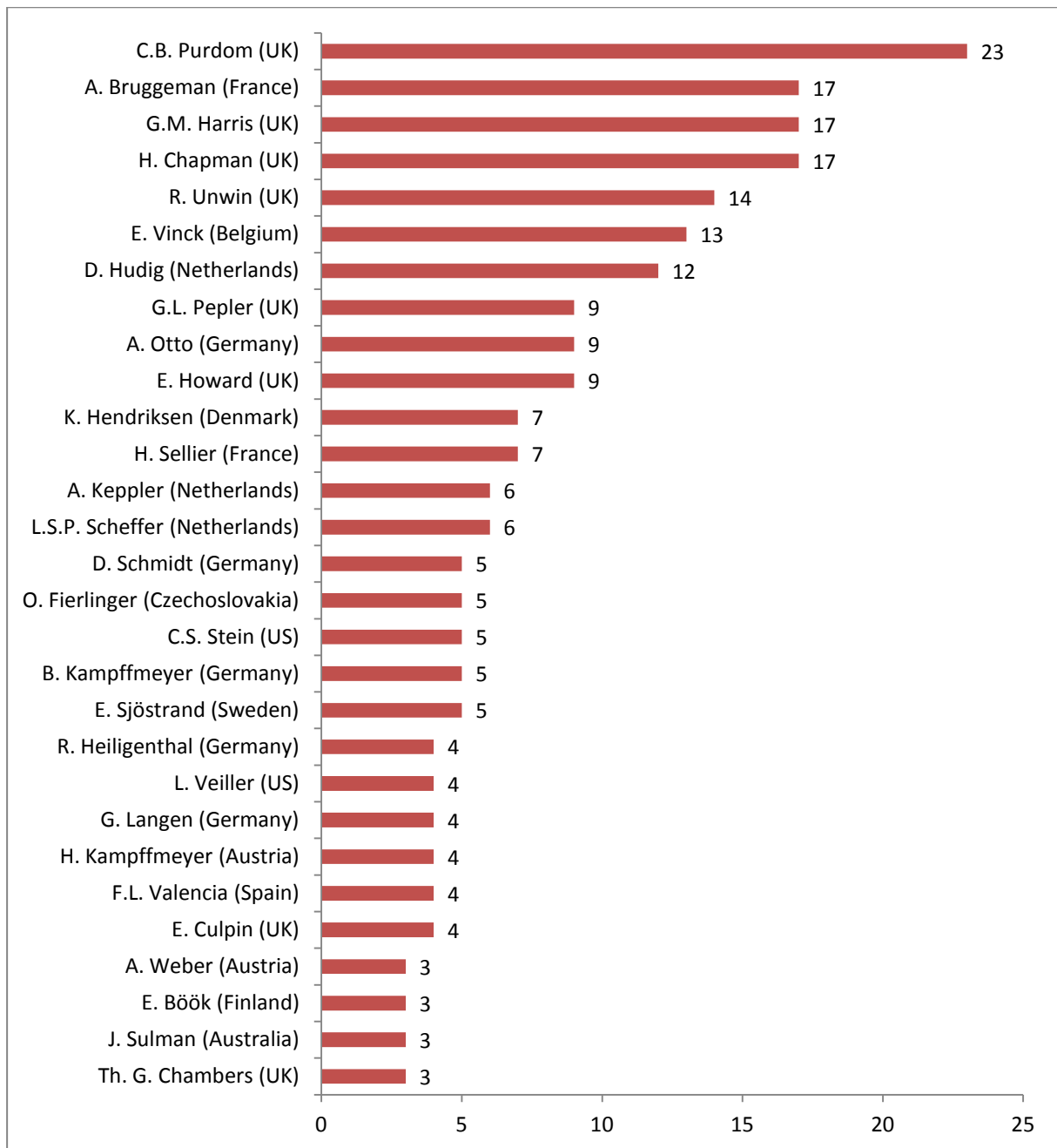


Table 1 Continuity of active membership in the Federation, expressed in attended meetings by individual active members. Minimal attendance is three meetings (Secretariat of the IFHP in The Hague, IFHP Archives, minutes of the executive committee and the council 1919-1926).

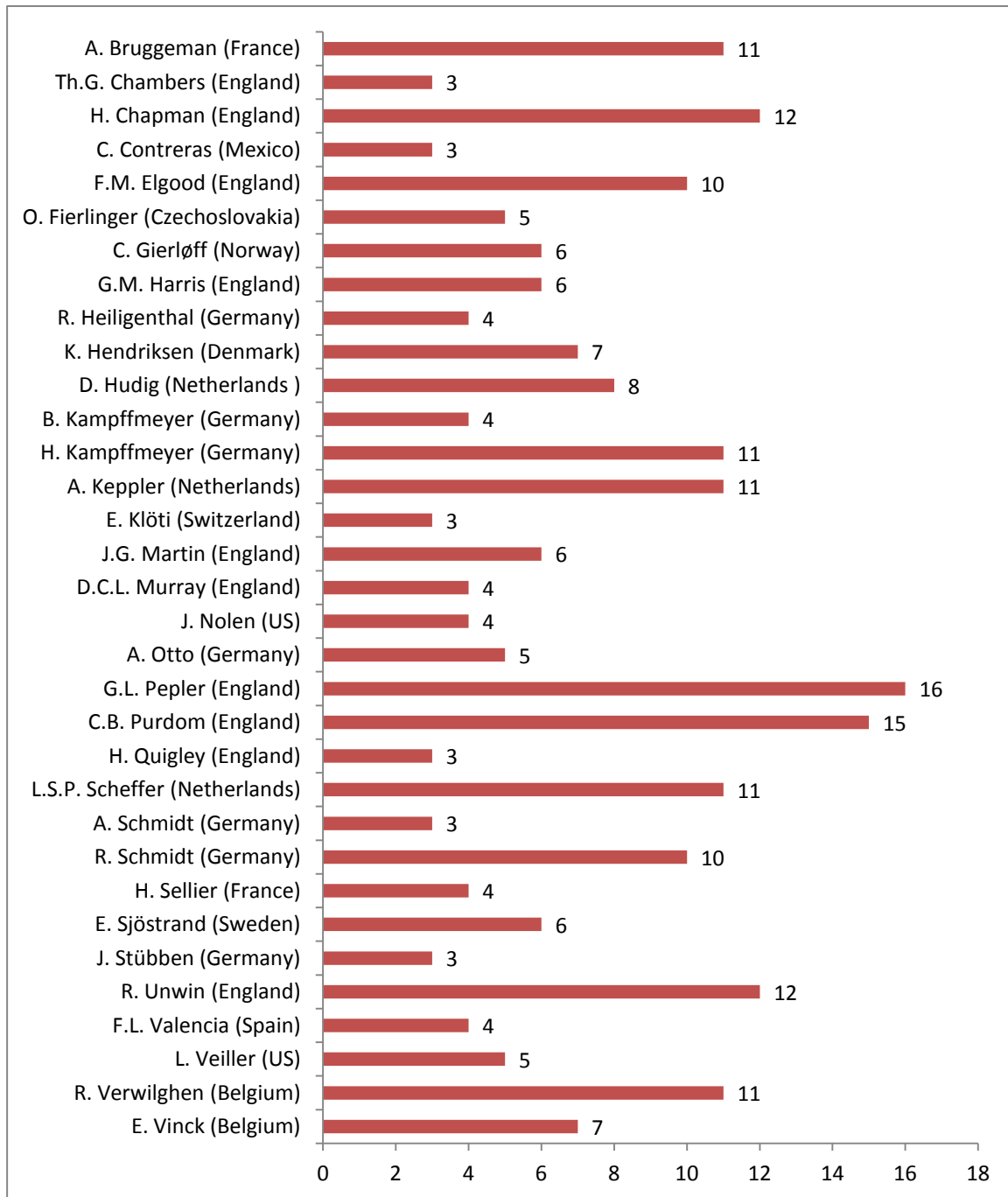


Table 2 Continuity of active membership in the Federation, expressed in attended meetings by individual active members. Minimal attendance is three meetings (Secretariat of the IFHP in The Hague, IFHP Archives, minutes of the executive committee and the council 1926-1937).

of a new town.” Howard successfully made his bid at the auction, initiating the Welwyn Garden City Gierløff experiment.<sup>10</sup>

Reiss accompanied Gierløff back to Norway for a lecture tour on garden cities. This tour probably accounts for the rather large Norwegian attendance at the first full flung postwar congress of the Federation in London in 1920. Norway presented the largest foreign delegation. A special post-congress tour was arranged for the Norwegians, which would spark active participation from the Netherlands. After the London meeting Norwegian participation shrunk to a more modest size, with primarily Gierløff taking care of the continuity. He acted as vice-president and executive member of the Federation from the early 1920s to 1937, acting as honorary chairman of the executive committee from 1935-1937. He was not a very loyal attendant of meetings of the executive. Basically, he mainly attended meetings at congresses. Probably this was a financial issue; there was no remuneration for attendance. In the mid-1930s he attended on a more regular basis, when he had secured a grant from the Carnegie Foundation to pay for his expenses as chairman. He managed to get *Boligsak i By og Bygd* acknowledged as official organ of the Federation in 1923 besides *Garden Cities and Town planning* (UK), *La Vie Urbaine* (France) and *Tijdschrift voor Volkshuisvesting and Stedebouw* (Netherlands). In 1937 Gierløff almost become the first Norwegian president of the Federation. His nomination was sabotaged in the final voting round.<sup>11</sup>

### **Borrowers and imposers**

Individuals and the national societies they represented engaged in transnational planning dialogue in the Urban Internationale with a purpose. Why did they join organizations such as the Federation? Planning historian Anthony Sutcliffe has identified two major considerations: artistic inspiration and Schumpeter’s classic innovation diffusion theory.<sup>12</sup> Dutch architect Jan Stuyt attended the first international conference of the IFHTP in London in 1914 to learn more about British garden city experience and enthusiastically reported his observations to a Dutch audience.<sup>13</sup> English representative miss Harris Browne contently noted that the foreign visitors at this congress were full of “admiration, not unmixed with envy”.<sup>14</sup> Being an association, the rationale of civil society – ‘united we stand, divided we fall’- of course also applies to the Federation.<sup>15</sup> By joining (transnational) associative life the members of the Federation gained a sense of belonging and by allying individual and national interests they could strengthen their lobby for better housing and town planning. According to Ewart Culpin, secretary of the GCTOPA and the Federation, the Federation served “to promote unity of action between workers for the same object in different countries.”<sup>16</sup>

The Federation was not just an international stage to learn from each other’s

experiences and to decide upon a shared course of action. The Federation was an international arena to gain standing and legitimacy for ideas, policies, professional standards, et cetera. International endorsement could be used to further one's goals at home. The British garden city workers had set up the Federation in 1913 as an international extension of the GCTPA to distribute British garden city experience on a global scale. But the foreign members used (the congresses of) the Federations for their own agenda as well. Dutch active member Dirk Hudig, secretary general of Netherlands Institute for Housing and Town Planning (NIVS), used the Amsterdam congress (1924) of the Federation to place regional planning prominently on the political agenda of the hosting country.<sup>17</sup>

Planning historian Stanley Buder has identified the Federation as an important conduit for professional affiliation.<sup>18</sup> Following the observations of architect Pierre Chabard and planning historian Jon A. Peterson about the advance of city planning in the United States we can identify two competing approaches to town planning in the Federation: urban reform, as a kind of civic action, and town planning as an emerging autonomous profession.<sup>19</sup> The latter ousted the former in the early 1920s. In this process of institutionalization and professionalization two distinct strands of transnational networking can be isolated. The first mobilized transnational resources to legitimize the position of professional city planners. The second promoted city planning among local authorities to create a field of action for this new profession.

Planning historian Stephen Ward separates two distinct modes of transnational planning dialogue: borrowing and imposition.<sup>20</sup> I assume these modes correlate to the agenda of the members and the form of participation (passive or active) adopted. Passive membership provided a ticket to the congresses of the Federation, facilitating networking and enabling members to digest the offered body of knowledge. Passive members had no direct influence on the congress program, so they had to 'shop' at different transnational platforms to acquire potential answers to their specific planning issues. As a consequence, they were not loyal congress attendants. To (directly) influence transnational flows of planning knowledge active membership was essential. Active members could put domestic issues on the program, facilitating focused borrowing. Moreover, they could put their own proposals, policies and plans on the program to seek international acknowledgement and support (legitimacy). If we accept circulating knowledge in the IFHTP as symbolic power, it is but a small step to relate active membership to Michel Foucault's ideas about the relation between power and knowledge in discursive formations.<sup>21</sup> The fact that one is considered an expert or has a right to speak, is not just based on knowledge, but also on the power to determine what knowledge is.

Considerations to engage in transnational dialogue must not be confused with considerations to join the Federation. Saunier has demonstrated that the Urban Internationale was made up of a myriad of organizations, addressing the same audience and covering the same issues, albeit from different perspectives, that rivaled for the favors of internationally oriented housing reformers and planners.<sup>22</sup> Many Federation members also pursued their agenda in rivaling international organizations. In fact, competition from

organizations such as the *Congrès Internationaux des Habitations à Bon Marché* (CIHBM) and the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA) had been a major consideration for the British garden city workers to start the Federation in 1913.<sup>23</sup>

What were the considerations of Gierløff and his colleagues to join the Federation? In the terms of Stephen Ward, the Norwegian active members basically were stereotypical borrowers. They sought inspiration from their British peers and wanted to stay in touch with the latest town planning developments. Moreover they used the potential of the Federation as professional conduit. Contemporary housing and planning periodicals provide a paper trail of Gierløff's endeavors to set up an international network and establish himself as the Norwegian town planning authority, an acknowledgement that could be put to use for his campaign for an improved environment in Norway.<sup>24</sup>

### **Negotiating transnational dialogue<sup>25</sup>**

To successfully perform as a platform for transnational planning dialogue the Federation had to accommodate the agendas of its members. Although several authors adequately point out that the congresses of the Federation followed the turbulent development of the town planning profession in the interwar years, the program of the Federation certainly was not just professionally informed by the latest planning innovations. For example, when the Federation was contemplating national planning in the mid-1930s, Soviet planners were notable absentees, although Soviet Russia was one of the few countries (besides Nazi Germany) that could pride itself in its comprehensive national planning regime.

The Federation was not a neutral stage where everybody could participate, nor was it a place where all ideas could be put forward. It was a place of symbolic power where individuals, organizations and institutions contested the definition of and action upon the city. It was an arena where planners navigated between (supposedly) universal scientific standards and domestic political and cultural requirements.<sup>26</sup> The program of the congresses of the Federation was the outcome of negotiations between the active members about legitimate subjects, participants and methods for discussion. Diverging agendas, national rivalries and political and cultural differences had to be ameliorated. The Federation also closely monitored the dominant players in the Urban Internationale – between the wars especially nongovernmental organizations such as the IULA and the International Housing Association, after the Second World War especially the intergovernmental United Nations and its agencies – to seek competitive advantage or, when advantages could not be identified, to seek collaboration. Consensus-seeking, rather than majority voting was the designated course.

Essentially, the Federation was, and still is, a platform for mainstream planning. Its congress agenda was primarily designed to appeal to as many members as possible and to draw the largest possible audience. This was not just a matter of a standing and prestige, but also reflected a financial urgency: the Federation was rather dependent on its congresses for revenue. Thus when the American hosts proposed national parks as a suitable subject for the Federation congress planned for 1940 at Los Angeles, the proposal was dismissed



because the subject held little relevance for other countries.<sup>27</sup> The congresses of the Federation had a strong focus on proven planning experience, rather than radical new ideas. The prevailing academic qualifications of the Federation, either as outdated dinosaur or (alternative) avant-garde, insufficiently take the nature of the Federation as mainstream platform for transnational planning dialogue into account. As a mainstream platform, the program of the congresses of the Federation simply reflected the opinion of a majority among housing reformers and town planners.<sup>28</sup>

The Federation was established by the British GCTPA in 1913 to distribute its policy of 'town planning on garden city lines' on a global scale. The early foreign members flocking to the Federation were foreign garden city zealots, eager to find inspiration and support from their British peers. The foreign members looked to the British initiator to take the lead. Thus the GCTPA gained firm control over its international offspring. Thus the prewar meetings of the Federation were dominated by British garden city experience.

During World War I transnational planning dialogue collapsed. The War also affected the Federation, but it managed to stay in business. The War inevitably dived membership in allies and enemies. The German and Austrian 'aggressors' were barred from membership until late 1922, which must have been a severe intellectual drain for the congress program, considering the pioneering achievements of 'Red Vienna' immediately after the war. Contact with the Russian members was severed and was deliberately not resorted after the bolshevist take-over. Western Europe feared a spread of the communist revolution and in this atmosphere any Soviet contribution would be controversial. Not satisfied with mere handling correspondence it embarked on its Belgium Reconstruction Campaign to initiate the Belgian debutants into the benefits of British town planning.<sup>29</sup> The Federation looked beyond its original backing and addressed a new audience: administrators and professionals. Ebenezer Howard raised the idea of an international model garden city in Belgium, whereas garden city purist C.B. Purdom, echoing the manifesto *New Towns after the War* (1918) by the New Townsmen, proposed setting up a national garden cities program. The scope of the Federation had narrowed from 'town planning on garden city lines' to true garden cities. At home, the British garden city workers had been tug-at-war for years about initiating a second garden city, so they were eager to transform Belgium into a model garden city nation as a powerful example to be followed at home and abroad. In their eagerness, the British garden city militants failed to account for sentiments among the foreign members. The Belgians embraced garden suburbs as a means to bring immediate relief near existing centers, but they dismissed the idea of true garden cities as impracticable.

The reconstruction campaign largely failed to produce the desired outcomes, so the British leaders of the Federation reappraised the objectives of the international body. The program of the Federation continued to be informed by the domestic agenda of the GCTPA. Also in Britain the garden suburb had overshadowed the true garden city. Thus garden city champions Purdom and Unwin presented their solution at the Federation congress in London in 1920: satellite towns. A satellite basically was a garden suburb enhanced with the properties of a true garden city. A year later satellites would be endorsed as official GCTPA

policy in *Town Theory and Practice* (1921). Unsurprisingly, the satellite idea did not convince the foreign members. Grand satellite schemes did not address the urgent need for mass affordable housing. The British cottage had long been outstripped by cheap(er) workers' houses on the continent.

The Belgian and French active members, fronted by Belgian senator Emile Vinck, politician and administrator Henri Sillier and town planning professor Auguste Bruggeman, increasingly resented the British garden city diktat. In 1922 they wanted more influence and attention for their own problems and achievements. This demand was supported by a steady stream of new members (especially new Dutch and German members). These newcomers mainly stemmed from governmental agencies and professional organizations, reflecting the rapid institutionalization of public housing and town planning in Western Europe. They turned to the Federation to resume their transnational trade, because the IULA and the CIHBM experienced great difficulties getting back on their feet again. In this new age of mass participation, the British active members soon found themselves outnumbered (table 3). Pressured by the foreign members, the British leaders of the Federation had to reassert the outlook of the International body. Through a series of reforms the firm grip of the GCTPA on its international counterpart was gradually loosened. Nonetheless, the Federation did retain its distinctly British corporate culture.

In an attempt to evade continental reservations about the rather high construction costs, the British garden city workers deliberately steered away from the garden city or satellite as mere attractive residential site planning model to enter the larger realm of regional planning. However, this strategy backfired. At the Gothenburg congress of the Federation in 1923 German planner Gustav Langen and American planner John Nolen revealed merely projecting satellites in the countryside was inadequate to coordinate suburbanization. The dissatisfied continental members jumped at the occasion to end the British garden city monopoly. The Federation urgently needed a new regional planning concept, a synthesis of British satellite planning and other regional planning experiences, that could meet the approval of all the members. Such became the formidable task for the Amsterdam congress of the Federation in 1924. Because the stakes were high, only tested planning experience was admitted. This practical experience had to be (politically) undisputed and consistent with the British satellite idea. The Federation called upon British planning pioneers Patrick Abercrombie, well-known for his regional plans, especially the plan for the Doncaster Region (1922) and former secretary of the GCTPA Thomas Adams, who was in charge of the *Regional Survey of New York and its Environs* (1922-1929), and German planning pioneers Robert Schmidt, director of the *Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk* (1920), the first legislatively backed regional plan in Europe, and Fritz Schumacher, the well-known architect-planner in charge of the extension plans of Cologne and Hamburg.<sup>30</sup> The Amsterdam congress achieved the desired synthesis in the form of the concept of regional decentralization. A year later Purdom endorsed the reappraised scope in his well-known *The Building of Satellite Towns* (1925).

Meanwhile the steady growth of membership called for organizational measures. So

by 1925 the Federation considered dividing its membership into four sections – one dedicated to housing, one to garden cities, one to regional planning and one to town planning. Continental housing reformers in the Federation were enthusiastic about the

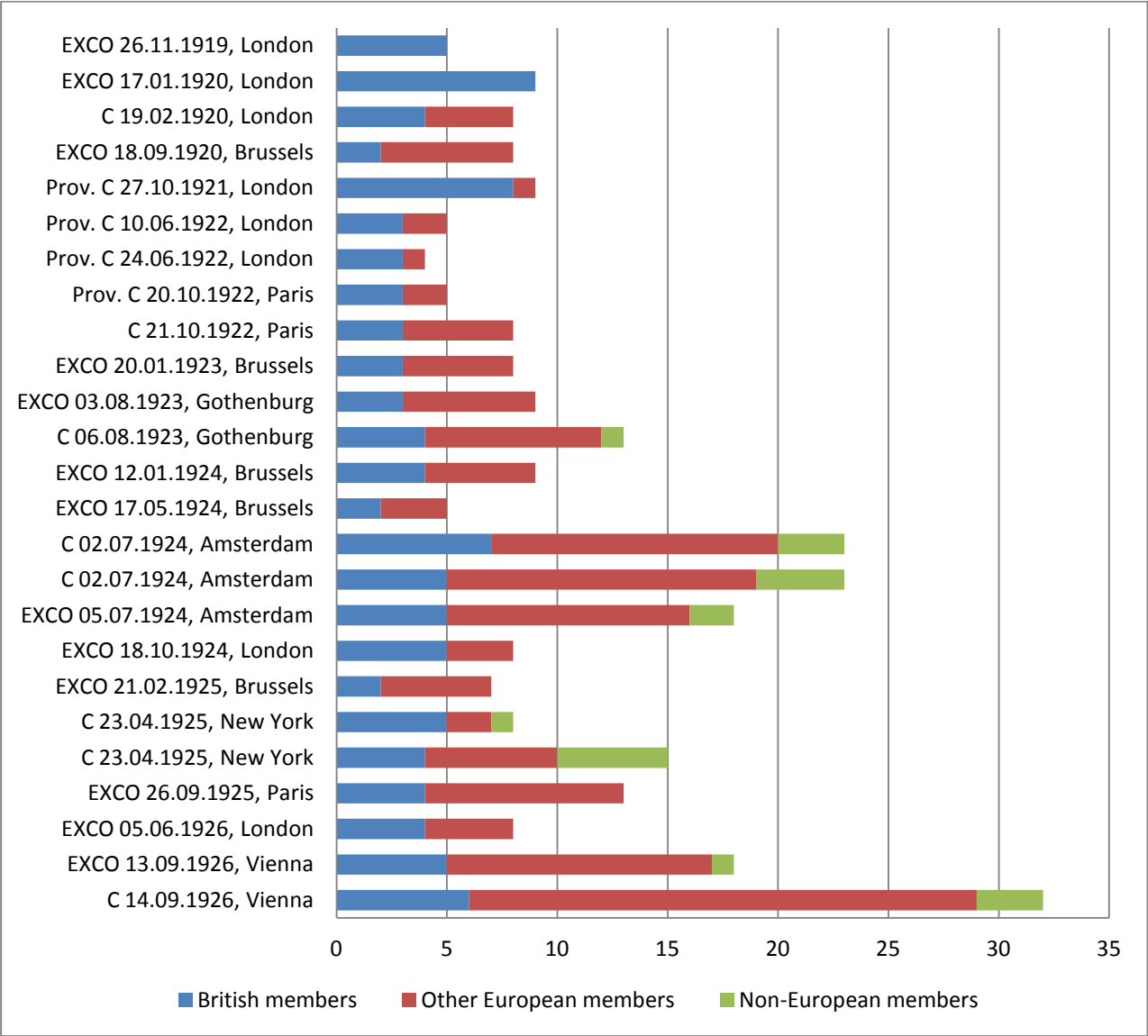


Table 3 Power balance at the meetings of the Executive Committee (EXCO), Council (C) and Provisional Council (Prov C) of the IFHTP in the period 1919-1926, expressed in attending active members (Secretariat of the IFHP, IFHP Archives, Minutes of the Executive committee and the Council in the period 1919-1926).

proposed housing section. After two congresses (Amsterdam 1924 and New York 1925) exclusively dedicated to regional planning, they were beginning to feel the housing question was being neglected. And the housing section also provided an opportunity to relieve strained relations with rivaling organizations that had followed the advance of the Federation with weary eyes. The Federation considered itself to be the prime platform in the Urban Internationale and was not exactly forthcoming to collaborate with rivaling bodies. However, when the faltering CIHBM proposed to transfer all its activities to the new housing section of the Federation, the latter was eager to arrange such a transfer. The condition that the housing section would have to retain some autonomy was easily met. Thus the CIHBM merged into the Federation at the Federation congress in Vienna in 1926.

The euphoria of the merger was short-lived. The Federation executives and the former dignitaries of the CIHBM almost immediately clashed over appropriate frameworks for transnational housing dialogue. The former envisioned a housing secretariat on the Continent independent from the hosting country, whereas the latter demanded a housing secretariat independent from the central Federation secretariat in London. Despite the ongoing organizational reforms, the dissatisfied continental housing reformers obviously thought the Federation still was too British. The 'housing controversy' was also about the relation between housing and town planning and the role of the State. The continental housing reformers wanted to treat housing as an independent, specialized discipline, whereas the Federation so far had treated housing as a part of a broader, comprehensive (regional) planning profession. Moreover, the continental housers wanted to exclusively promote public (State sponsored) housing, whereas the Federation did not want to confine its scope to one specific housing method. The housing controversy also posed a direct confrontation between the quintessentially British governance style of the Federation (honorary officers, harmony and unanimity) and a more business-like, continental culture of decision-making (paid staff, majority voting). Because the ringleaders of the housing section also acted as executives of the IULA, the Federation officers accused the 'jealous' IULA of sabotaging the advance of the Federation. The controversy escalated. In 1929 the discontent housing reformers stepped outside the Federation to establish their own International Housing Association (IHA) with its seat in Frankfurt.

The establishment of the IHA did not restore internal peace in the Federation. In the face of disharmony the section idea was rapidly abandoned. Instead, a permanent technical committee was established to prepare congress themes and research projects. The internal atmosphere was tense. Federation membership was divided into sympathizers and opponents of the IHA, and those anxiously avoiding choosing sides. Who had the 'oldest rights' to promote housing: the Federation or the IHA? The two bodies had to come to an agreement. The IHA urged a demarcation of the working sphere, which was unacceptable to the Federation. So they settled for a practical collaboration on the congresses that both

organizations were organizing at Berlin in 1931. These congresses failed to distinct one from another, embarrassing the proprietors that two separate venues had been necessary. Thus the two started negotiating close collaboration, preferably even re-amalgamation. The negotiations were greatly hampered by lingering distrust and personal feuds.

More importantly, the Nazis had 'kidnapped' the IHA. The Nazis only agreed to a reunion if it would provide them sounder footing in the Federation. They wanted to use the Federation as a vehicle to promote the Nazi ideology of *Neues Europa*, one united Europe under German leadership. Eventually, in 1937 an agreement was reached and the two bodies reunited. The re-amalgamation was only made possible by silencing outspoken opponents and by anxiously ignoring the controversies that had started the housing controversy in the first place. The terms for a reunion were a heavily contested compromise. The honorary officers were abolished and replaced by a paid Secretary General and a Bureau, acting as inner executive, the central offices were to be removed from London to the Continent (not in Germany though) and Nazi Germany was offered the prospect of a German president of the Federation in 1938.

The housing controversy heavily affected the transnational planning dialogue in the Federation. The Federation put most of its energy in solving the housing controversy and reaching agreement with the IHA. As a consequence its congress activity dropped (it must be pointed out that the Great Depression had some influence here as well). The controversy immediately affected the congress program of the Federation. A rigid, at times artificial separation between housing and planning issues was introduced, which undoubtedly served to emphasize the position of the Federation as heir apparent to the former CIHBM (a position which the IHA denied). The housing sessions circled around two closely interrelated subjects: high-rise developments and slum clearance. So far the Federation had exclusively propagated one family houses, but it no longer could deny the advance of high-rise tenement compounds, both in suburbia and urban renewal schemes. It could not ignore reality and had to come to terms with high-rise development in urban areas. The IFHTP continued to favor low-rise development, but now it accepted tenements as a necessary evil. The planning sessions initially continued to follow the path of regional decentralization. Despite the success of decentralization, the overcrowded cities did not dissolve. So the IFHTP had to address the old cities. First it turned its attention to the preservation of the historic city centers, as urban redevelopments and the growing volume of traffic threatened urban heritage. From there it reconsidered its conception of city extensions within a regional frame. Regional decentralization matured into regional recentralization as advocates of satellite planning sought a new frame to reconcile and control inner city dynamics and the flight to suburbia.

The reunited Federation was a pitched battleground where the old British leaders and their allies, who frenetically wanted to hold on the old ways, former dignitaries of the IHA and representatives of the Nazi regime battled for dominion. The issue of the new location of the Federation headquarters had to be resolved. A new force from the other side of the Atlantic joined the power struggle. American representatives from the Public

Authority Clearing House, or simply PACH, and affiliated professional housing and planning organizations united at the campus of Chicago University, the so-called '1313 groups' after their shared accommodation at 1313<sup>th</sup> Street, joined the European based exponents of the Urban Internationale, including the Federation, the IHA, the IULA and the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS). Powered by the vast resources of the Rockefeller Foundation, they set forth to end the continuous squabbling among the international organizations over scarce resources, overlapping audiences and prestige and force them towards a new world order based on cooperation and efficiency on American lines. The Americans wanted to set up a European equivalent of PACH in Brussels and subsequently successfully forced the Federation, the IULA and the IIAS to move into a shared accommodation in Brussels in 1938.<sup>31</sup> When Karl Strölin, *Oberbürgermeister* of Stuttgart and rising star in the NSDAP, took over the presidency in 1938 he was unable to strengthen the German influence as anti-German sentiments rapidly increased among the Federation members because of the German persecution of Jews and leftwing activists and the invasion of neighboring countries.

After the outbreak of the Second World War the Nazis seized total control over the Federation. The Brussels secretariat was carted off to Stuttgart and fully integrated into the municipal apparatus. The representative structure of the IFHTP was by-passed and Strölin drew all power towards him. Membership inevitably was confined to Nazi Germany, its allies, the occupied territories and some neutral countries that still could be reached. Organizing world congresses became impossible. Thus the Federation acted as main medium for transnational dialogue until the Stuttgart secretariat was forced to close its doors. Meanwhile, in London prominent Federation member George L. Pepler was setting up an Inter-allied Study Group on Reconstruction – in which Norway was represented by architect Erik Rolfsen (1905-1992) - which became the nucleus for the postwar Federation.<sup>32</sup>

The Nazis were unable to leave their mark on the last Federation congresses before the war. Although they were fervent supporters of *Raumplanung*, the German equivalent of an all-encompassing comprehensive planning discipline, the strict separation between housing and planning issues persevered. In the final years of peace the housing dialogue introduced new themes: housing in tropical climates and housing of special groups. In wartime the scope soon narrowed, as Nazi ideology and (military) censorship dictated the dialogue. Strölin only introduced one new highly topical housing theme: emergency housing. The main subject of the planning dialogue at last two congresses was national planning, a field in which the Germans excelled. During the War Strölin readily drew on the acknowledgment of German national planning. He presented *Raumplanung* as the ultimate tool to achieve the new order of *Neues Europa*. He praised German planning experiments in Eastern Europe (*Generalplan Ost*), where *Raumplanung* had assumed the dimension of *Weltraumplanung*. The Federation was to be a valuable partner in the shaping of the new German new world order. However, most Federation members in the occupied territories did not want to become part of this new order.

What position did the Norwegian active members chose in the fierce negotiations

within the Federation? Considering the orientation of the *Norse Forening av Boligreformer* towards the garden city (*hageby*) concept and its admiration of the British garden city achievements<sup>33</sup>, it is hardly surprising that the Norwegians were to be found among the most loyal supporters of the British honorary officers. The latter acknowledged the loyal support of the Norwegian faction, hence the appointment of Gierløff as chairman of the executive committee in 1935 and the subsequent nomination for interim presidency in 1937. It was his outspoken support for the British that cost Gierløff his presidency. Because he had openly criticized the removal of the Federation secretariat from Brussels, the IHA only agreed to a reunion if Pepler would serve as interim president of the reunited body. Although Pepler also was a British officer, he was one of the architects of the reunion and known for his preparedness to let old wounds heal and seek practical collaboration.

### **The art of congressing**

From the outset, the Federation envisioned its world congresses as main medium for transnational planning dialogue. The Federation was a successful congress proprietor. Its congresses continuously drew larger audiences, while the steady expansion of congress themes kept pace with the turbulent development of the town planning profession between the wars. The surviving hefty congress reports are their enduring monuments. It is not hard to imagine their appeal. Reports on foreign experiences and publications in national periodicals, foreign periodicals and publications, study trips abroad and correspondence were regular dishes on many a planner's menu. International exhibitions and congresses spiced up this international diet. Such international events provided a focal point on an international level where the latest achievements of the national housing and planning practices were presented in a condensed fashion. Moreover, the physical performance of these congresses offered an extra dimension to the transnational trade of ideas and experiences by facilitating face-to-face dialogue. Corridor chats and acquaintances were just as valuable. How effective were these congresses for transnational planning dialogue?

The surviving official congress reports tell a tale of steadily increasing dedicated audiences and productive discussions. We must account for the fact that the congress reports represent a regulated and manipulated reality. The previous section of this paper already discussed that the congresses of the Federation did not pose an open platform where everybody could participate and all ideas could be put forward. Ongoing negotiations between active members in power and active members aspiring power defined legitimate subjects and participants for discussion. Moreover, the reports of course were edited to present the Federation from its best side.

First hand witnesses provide a totally different picture of the Federation congresses. Their poor ad hoc preparation was notorious. Discussions were generally badly prepared, papers and report circulated too late (or not at all). The bulk of the audience at the conferences by the mid-1920s was constituted by a growing contingent of anonymous civil servants. It is questionable how many of these registered delegates actually attended meetings – there is ample evidence that some preferred sightseeing in the hosting city – but

when they appeared, the sessions became overcrowded. It was the profoundness of the discussions that suffered from mass participation. Thus in 1926 German delegate Ockert proposed to reserve congress participation to a restricted group of experts, a proposal that was rejected because the Federation was heavily depending on its congresses for revenue.<sup>34</sup> Of course we also have to account for cultural and language barriers that had to be breached. In times before headphones and simultaneous translation – when available they often did not work properly – lectures and discussions were tedious and long-winded affairs: presentations had to be summarized in different languages, and of course arguments in discussions also had to be continuously translated.

Despite the exploration of the contours of the evolving town planning profession in the official sessions, most loyal congress delegates attributed more importance to the informal dimensions of the congresses. In an interview at the Stockholm congress in 1939, Norwegian town planner Sverre Pedersen intimated what according to him ‘the art of congressing’ was all about. According to him, this art was not about attending sessions, but about networking opportunities, about meeting foreign colleagues. The interviewer readily noted that a lot of delegates were practicing this art during the sessions, outside in the sun.<sup>35</sup>

The corridor chats were not just about meeting and greeting. With regard to the Federation congress at New York in 1925 Purdom complained about unofficial speakers who “brought papers with them which they read whenever an opportunity presented itself.”<sup>36</sup> One of these clandestine speakers was Ottawa’s engineer-planner Noulan Couchon, a fervent militant of the hexagonal city concept, a concept that was deemed illegitimate for the official program (Unwin had attacked Arthur C. Comey, another protagonist of hexagonal planning at the Gothenburg congress in 1923). Couchon’s ‘illegal’ paper was well-received. It was reprinted in numerous technical journals and landed him several invitations for conferences in the United States. At the conference, especially British planner Barry Parker received Couchon’s presentation enthusiastically. Parker had become obsessed with what he called “the present motor age” and “economy of development.” He was very susceptible to Couchon’s ideas and later tried to combine the hexagonal schemes with the Radburn-layout (1929), first in a theoretical paper, later on the ground of his influential Wythenshawe scheme near Manchester.<sup>37</sup>

Not just individual members used the opportunities of informal meetings at the congresses of the Federation. Also the *Association Internationale des Cités Linéaires* (AICL), established in 1928, was to be found in the corridors of the Federation congresses. Frenchman George Benoît Lévy was the spiritual father of this newcomer, which was little more than an international extension of the French Garden City Association. Benoît Lévy disseminated an interesting hotchpotch of rivaling town planning conceptions. He had started out as a pure garden city advocate, although his definition of the garden city idea was notoriously broad and vague. After a meeting with Arturo Soria y Mata in 1912 he fell under the spell of the linear city concept.<sup>38</sup> It must have been around this time that he combined the two concepts in what he regarded a superior alternative: linear garden cities.



In the 1920s he enhanced his linear garden city with hexagonal planning.<sup>39</sup> The AICL actually used the corridors of the congresses of the IFHTP to arrange meetings of its members, to maintain and expand its networks and ultimately to spread its linear city message.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

Norwegian protagonists of the housing and town planning movement joined the International Federation for Housing and Planning after the First world War to partake in the transnational planning dialogue facilitated by this international platform. The dominant Norwegian Participants were Christian Gierløff, secretary general of the *Norsk Forening av Boligreformer* (the predecessor of Norsk BOBY), and architect Sverre Pedersen, town planning professor at the *Norges Tekniske Høgskole*. These Norwegians joined the Federation to seek inspiration from their British peers, to stay in touch with the latest town planning developments and to build an international peer network to establish themselves as Norwegian town planning authorities.

The organization they joined was not an open platform, where everybody could participate and every idea could be put forward. As a mainstream platform for planning dialogue it wanted to appeal to as many members as possible and to draw the largest possible audience. Ongoing negotiations between active members in power and active members aspiring power defined legitimate subjects and participants for discussion. Initially the agenda was exclusively defined by the British garden city workers that had established the Federation. In the 1920s the Federation became a pitched battle ground where the British leaders and their supporters and a group of prominent continental members contested the definition of appropriate subjects, participants and methods for transnational dialogue. In the 1930s representatives of the German Nazi regime and American representatives of the '1313 groups', who both wanted to reform transnational planning dialogue after a self defined new world order, joined the fierce negotiations within the Federation. Throughout this period the Norwegian participants profiled themselves as loyal supporters of the British leaders.

The world congresses were the main medium of the Federation for transnational planning dialogue. Although these congresses attracted growing audiences of more than a thousand delegates and their expanding program matched the turbulent development of the town planning profession between the wars, the official sessions were rather overcrowded and poorly organized, the proceedings tedious, shallow and long-winded. Seasoned congress delegates considered the opportunity for informal talks and networking to be the real added value of the Federation congresses.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pierre Yves Saunier, "Sketches of the Urban Internationale, 1910-50: voluntary associations, international institutions and US philanthropic foundations", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2 (2001), 380-403.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Buder, *Visionaries and planners. The garden city movement and the modern community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Kees Somer, *The Functional City. CIAM and the legacy of Van Eesteren, 1928-1960* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Stephen V. Ward, *Planning the twentieth-century city: the advanced capitalist world* (Chichester: Wiley & Sons, 2002).

- 
- <sup>5</sup> Gerd Albers, *Zur Entwicklung der Stadtplanung in Europa. Begegnungen, Einflüsse, Verflechtungen*, (Braunschweig: Vieweg, 1997).
- <sup>6</sup> Joel Outtes, "At the crossroad of urban and housing reform: the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning and its congresses (1913-1948)", paper delivered at *Cities in Europe, places and institutions. 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Urban History* (Venice: European Association for Urban History, September 3-5, 1998).
- <sup>7</sup> Renzo Riboldazzi, *Un'altra modernità. L'IFHP e la cultura urbanistica tra le due guerre 1923-1939* (Rome: Gangemi, 2010).
- <sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.
- <sup>9</sup> Trond Dancke, *Boligsak i utvikling. Norse Forenning for Bolig- og Byplanlegging 1913-1988* (Oslo: Norse Forenning for Bolig- og Byplanlegging, 1988); Rolf Jensen, *Moderne norsk byplanlegging blir til*, (Stockholm: Nordplan, 1981).
- <sup>10</sup> L.R. Reiss, *A memoir* (Swindon: Swindon Signcraft Ltd, 196?); Folder "reminiscences of Christian Gierloff", FJO/K63-K69, The Sir Frederic Osborn Archive at Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies (HALS).
- <sup>11</sup> Michel Geertse 2012, "Defining the universal city. The International Federation for Housing and Town Planning and transnational planning dialogue 1913-1945", unpublished PhD thesis (Amsterdam: VU University, 2012).
- <sup>12</sup> Anthony Sutcliffe, *Towards the planned city: Germany, Britain, the United States and France, 1780-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher, 1981).
- <sup>13</sup> Jan Stuyt "De tour door Engeland met de Garden-Cities Association", *Bouwkundig Weekblad* 34 (1914), 409-412, 427-429, 442-449, 451- 454.
- <sup>14</sup> M.E. Harris Browne, "Some impressions", *Garden Cities & Town Planning Magazine* 4 (1914), 181-184.
- <sup>15</sup> Robert Putnam, *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
- <sup>16</sup> Ewart G. Culpin, "International Garden Cities and Town Planning Association", *Garden cities and Town Planning Magazine* 3 (1913), 225.
- <sup>17</sup> Peter de Ruijter, *Voor Volkshuisvesting en Stedebouw* (Utrecht: Stichting Matrijs 1987); Bosma
- <sup>18</sup> Buder, *Visionaries and planners*, 143.
- <sup>19</sup> Pierre Chabard, "Competing scales in transnational networks: the impossible travel of Patrick Geddes' Cities Exhibition to America, 1911-1913", *Urban History* 36 (2009), 202-203; J.A. Peterson, *The Birth of City Planning in the United States 1840-1917* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press 2003).
- <sup>20</sup> Stephen V. Ward, "Re-examining the international diffusion of planning" in Robert Freestone (ed.), *Urban planning in a changing world: the twentieth century experience* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 40-60.
- <sup>21</sup> Michel Foucault, "Two lectures" in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/knowledge: selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980): 78-108.
- <sup>22</sup> Saunier, "Sketches of the Urban Internationale".
- <sup>23</sup> Michel Geertse, "Defining the universal city", 38-39; Wouter Van Acker, Michiel Dehaene and Pieter Uyttenhove, "Tussen stedenbouw en stadsbestuur: de stedentoonstelling van Patrick Geddes en het internationaal stedencongres" in Wouter Van Acker and Christophe Verbruggen (eds.), *Gent 1913: op het breukvlak van de moderniteit* (Kortrijk: Snoeck, 2013), 168.
- <sup>24</sup> See for example "Garden cities in Norway", *Housing Betterment* 11:1 (January 1922), 43.
- <sup>25</sup> This entire section is based on Geertse, "Defining the universal city", unless stated otherwise.
- <sup>26</sup> M. Kohlrausch, K. Steffen and S. Wiederkehr (eds.), *Expert cultures in Central Eastern Europe. The internationalization of knowledge and the transformation of nation states since World War I* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2010).
- <sup>27</sup> Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of the Bureau, held in Stockholm, July 10<sup>th</sup> 1939, together with delegates from the USA, IFHP Archives, IFHP Secretariat, The Hague.
- <sup>28</sup> Catherine Bauer, *Modern Housing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934).
- <sup>29</sup> Pieter Uyttenhove, "Internationale inspanningen voor een modern België" in Marcel Smets (ed.), *RESURGAM. De Belgische wederopbouw na 1914*, (Brussels: Gemeentekrediet van België, 1985): 271-283.
- <sup>30</sup> Koos Bosma, *J.M. De Casseres. De eerste planoloog* (Rotterdam: Uitgeverij 010, 2003), 31; Koos Bosma, *Ruimte voor een nieuwe tijd: vormgeving van de Nederlandse regio, 1900-1945* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 1993).
- <sup>31</sup> Pierre Yves Saunier, "Ulysses of Chicago: American foundations and public administration, 1900-1960", in G. Gemelli and R. MacLeod (eds.), *American foundations in Europe, grant-giving policies, cultural diplomacy and trans-Atlantic relations, 1920-1980* (Brussels: College of Europe, 2003).
- <sup>32</sup> Phillip Wagner, "A Transnational Lobby for Postwar Planning? The International Federation for Housing and Town Planning in the 1940s and 1950s", paper delivered at *Cities & Societies in Comparative Perspective, 11<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Urban History* (Prague: European Association for Urban History, 29 August- 1 September 2012).
- <sup>33</sup> Dancke, *Boligsak i utvikling*.
- <sup>34</sup> Albers 1997, 191-192.
- <sup>35</sup> "Städtebauer bei der Arbeit. Die Kunst des 'Kongressierens' in Stockholm", paper clipping from the *Frankfurter Zeitung* (July 1939), no. 45, archive no. 1006, Archive of the *Internationaler Verband für Wohnungswesen und Städtebau*, City Archive of Stuttgart.
- <sup>36</sup> C.B. Purdom, "The International Conference at New York", *Garden Cities and Town planning Magazine* 15 (1925), 194-198.
- <sup>37</sup> Eran Ben-Joseph and David Gordon, "Hexagonal planning in theory and practice", *Journal of Urban Design* 5 (2000), 237-265.

---

<sup>38</sup> Arturo Soria y Mata (author) and Georges Benoît Lévy (translator), *La cité linéaire : nouvelle architecture de villes : rapport présenté par la "Compañía madrileña de urbanización" dans le "premier congrès international de l'art de construire villes et organisation de la vie municipale", de Gand* (Paris: 1913).

<sup>39</sup> Georges Benoît Lévy, "Hexagonopolis", *La Technique du Travaux* (May 1928), 316-318.

<sup>40</sup> Annual Reports 1929-1930, 1931-1932 and 1932-1933 of the *Association Internationale des Cités Linéaires* , # W1000/25/1-4, Archives of the International Labour Office, ILO, Geneva.