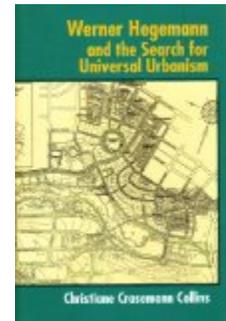


Christiane Crasemann Collins. *Werner Hegemann and the Search for Universal Urbanism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005. 417 S. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-393-73156-9.

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Published on H-Urban (September, 2006)



## “Observant Critic” of the Modern City

Christiane Crasemann Collins provides a great service to Anglo-American scholars in this volume on the life of Werner Hegemann (1881-1936), a German urbanist whose intellectual commitment, idealism and peripatetic lifestyle enriched early-twentieth-century discussions of the modern city on both sides of the Atlantic. Despite the contemporary significance of his contributions, architectural and planning scholarship overlooked Hegemann’s writings until relatively recently, when his English language work received renewed attention with the re-publication of *The American Vitruvius: An Architect’s Handbook of Civic Art* and its celebration by members of the New Urbanism movement.[1] Collins’s thorough examination of his writings in German and English now provides context for those interested in his architectural and planning ideals. Urban historians also benefit from her close reading of the record left by an individual whose life embodies the “Atlantic crossings” associated with the social politics of the Progressive era and the developing field of city planning.[2]

The biography’s value rests to a large extent upon Collins’s privileged access to Hegemann’s personal papers as well as time spent in an extensive number of European and American archives. As an historian of modern architecture and city planning, specializing in central Europe as well as the Americas, Collins earned the confidence of the Hegemann family and, as a consequence, his papers stayed with her over a twenty-year period as she worked on his biography. The resulting story offers insight into the life of a renaissance man who displayed strong convictions and idealistic visions to match

his wide-ranging talents during a period of upheaval that tested such optimism. Hegemann’s personal narrative is fascinating in itself, involving such challenging conditions as being “stranded” outside of Germany during World War I, leaving his country in the early 1930s as a political refugee, and struggling to support his family while exiled in America before his relatively early death at the age of fifty-four. *Werner Hegemann and the Search for Universal Urbanism*, however, offers more than the life story of an interesting man. The biography reads as a veritable “who’s who” of early twentieth-century urbanists and it is her effort to situate Hegemann’s vision of the city and modern society among these individuals that makes Collins’s contribution to architectural and planning history particularly valuable.

In traditional form, the biography follows Hegemann’s life chronologically, setting out the phases of his life in six chapters. Chapter 1 details Hegemann’s education and early professional development, illustrating his willingness and ability to move among countries and languages in pursuit of his interest in social issues. Collins establishes several themes regarding Hegemann’s life from these first pages. First, his curiosity about the world sends him off at an early age as a searcher and independent world traveler. At the age of sixteen, he left on school holiday with the intention of walking alone to Copenhagen. After arriving there, he purchased an inexpensive ticket and ended his holiday by sailing to New York for the first time. Second, his wide-ranging curiosity extended to educational wanderings as well. Despite his interests in urbanism and architecture, he did not enroll

in the urban-design-based coursework in Germany that served as the earliest curriculum for city planning. Instead, he pursued coursework in economics and history, attending universities in Berlin, Paris and Philadelphia before completing his doctorate in political science at the University of Munich in 1908. His well-directed American travels allowed him to meet leaders in the city planning movement through his involvement in the “Boston 1915” exhibition and through his classmates at the University of Pennsylvania, including John Nolen, Benjamin C. Marsh and Rexford Tugwell. Collins’s discussion of Hegemann’s education and peers provides broader insight into the developing field of city planning and the struggle to define its foundation as *either* a social science *or* design profession. A third theme suggests that Hegemann excelled as a non-conformist committed to challenging the status quo in search of a better world.

While chapter 1 focuses on his “*Lehr-und-Wanderjahre* (formative years)” (p. 32), chapter 2 examines his early career in Germany (1909-12) focusing on his experience as general secretary for the Universal City Planning Exhibition (*Allgemeine Stadtebau-Ausstellung*), his documentation of the exhibits, and his participation in planning debates concerning Greater Berlin. This chapter provides further evidence of Hegemann’s tremendous drive, intellect and energy as well as his remarkable connections and timing. Collins describes the period from 1904 to 1914 as the most “vibrant” period for the emerging discipline of city planning, noting that Hegemann had the good fortune to be involved in key events on both sides of the Atlantic. His involvement in “Boston 1915” provided him with the credentials for his new position in which he organized two major city planning exhibitions and fostered international contacts among urbanists. Then drawing on the exhibits and personal knowledge, he produced two volumes titled *Der Stadtebau* (*City Planning* 1 and 2), comparing achievements in North American, French, German and British cities.

In an era when an increasing number of Americans took their European grand tour in the form of social and civic fact-finding trips, Hegemann’s particular set of skills, knowledge and drive launched his international career. At the invitation of the People’s Institute in New York, Hegemann left Berlin for a U.S. lecture tour in 1913. Chapter 3 begins with a description of his year visiting large and medium-sized cities on the tour and ends eight years later with the publication of *American Vitruvius: An Architect’s Handbook of Civic Art* ( *or Civic Art*) and his return to Germany. The outbreak of World

War I interrupted his first effort to return home in 1914 and Hegemann dealt with the unexpected need to establish himself in America. For those interested in Hegemann’s landscape architecture practice and partnership with Elbert Peet, this chapter is the heart of the book. Collins details their various projects and collaboration on *Civic Art*, a choice of terms that reflected Hegemann’s effort to distance himself from the City Beautiful movement. She also notes that throughout his career Hegemann fought to reconcile his progressive ideals “with his aesthetic interests, sense of history, and cognizance of the symbolic value of civic centers and monuments” (p. 87). His posthumously published *City Planning: Housing* complemented *Civic Art* in that struggle, although it receives even less attention today than his writings on urban design.[3]

Why time has obscured Hegemann’s contributions is an interesting question in and of itself. Collins’s explanation rests primarily on professional compartmentalization and changing intellectual and aesthetic trends. This argument is well supported in chapter 4 as she describes his battles with German modernist architects during the 1920s. Employed by Wasmuth Verlag publishing house, renowned for its art and architectural publications, Hegemann served as the editor for their architectural journal for nearly a decade. In this capacity, his non-conformist tendencies were clearly displayed as pitched debates in the journal branded him as hostile to the modernist movement and he increasingly became marginalized. The debates, loaded at times with the cultural politics of German nationalism, are worthy of attention as they shed light on the politics of design in general and the particular shifts within modernism.

Chapter 5 parallels the period addressed in chapter 4, filling in the details of his personal life, lecture tour in Argentina, and challenges to contemporary German politics through his historical writings. An offer of a teaching position at the New School for Social Research in 1933 provided Hegemann and his family the way out of an increasingly difficult life in Germany. Chapter 6 addresses his final years as a refugee, underscoring his continued productivity as he advocated for a city planning curriculum with a comprehensive, scientific basis.

Collins’s comprehensive biography offers insight into a complex individual who, she concludes, might be best described as an “observant critic”—rather than a practicing planner or architect (p.10). Dense with information, the book details his wide-ranging activities and, although one might wish at times for some editing, al-

lows readers with different interests to locate the aspects of Hegemann's life that reflect their particular concerns. As a result of her close reading of his written record in the four-hundred-plus pages (including text plus notes) that result, the reader will have to rely on other sources to understand the larger context of German social politics during the early-twentieth century.[4] However, Collins's work still fills a gap that exists in much of architectural, planning and urban history by addressing German influences on city planning. Dr. Collins's careful accounting of Hegemann's ideas and ideals should appeal to many with an interest in modernism and the modern city.

#### Notes

[1]. Werner Hegemann with Elbert Peets, *The American Vitruvius: An Architect's Handbook of Civic Art* (New York: The Architectural Book Publishing Co., 1922).

[2]. See Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

[3]. Werner Hegemann with Elbert Peets, *City Planning: Housing*, vol. 1, *Historical and Sociological* and vol. 2, *Political Economy and Civic Art*, ed. Ruth Nanda Anshen; vol. 3, *A Graphic Review of Civic Art 1922-1937*, ed. William W. Forster and Robert C. Weinberg (New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co. Inc., 1936, 1937, 1938).

[4]. For instance, see Daniel T. Rodgers's discussion in *Atlantic Crossings* of Germany's social democratic political culture and its influence on British and American considerations of early-twentieth-century urban conditions and social policy.

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**Citation:** Judith Kenny. Review of Crasemann Collins, Christiane, *Werner Hegemann and the Search for Universal Urbanism*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. September, 2006.

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