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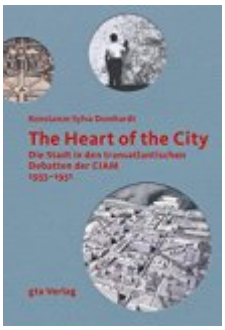

Konstanze Sylva Domhardt. *The Heart of the City: Die Stadt in den transatlantischen Debatten der CIAM 1933-1951*. Zürich: Gta Verlag, 2012. 421 pp. ISBN 978-3-85676-277-3.

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The story of CIAM, the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne, an international network of modernist architects and urban planners founded in 1928, is well known to students of twentieth-century architecture and urban development. CIAM is frequently associated with radical modernism, functionally divided cities, and the utopian housing schemes of Le Corbusier. Since the 1960s, this style of planning has been famously critiqued by Jane Jacobs, Victor Gruen, and others demanding a return to mixed-use neighborhoods and vital city centers.[1]Today, what is seen as CIAM's brand of planning is frequently indicted as one of the cardinal sins of mid-twentieth-century "high modernism," producing abstract and lifeless urban landscapes divorced from social needs.[2]

Konstanze Domhardt provides a subtle, yet profound re-reading of this story that challenges the reigning perception of CIAM. Based on a wealth of archival documentation, she argues against reducing CIAM planning doctrine to prescriptions for a functionally divided city based on the well-known Charter of Athens. Instead, she carefully traces the plurality of urban visions that competed within CIAM. Rather than radical iconoclasts, she portrays leading CIAM protagonists as eager recipients and adapters of progressive planning traditions in their respective countries. Deemphasizing the impact of Le Corbusier, she highlights the contributions of CIAM members in Great Britain and North America beginning in the mid-1930s and the influence that transatlantic debates about neighborhood units and holistic urban planning had on the group. This culminated in the 1951 CIAM 8 meeting, thematically focused on the "Heart of the City." Domhardt demonstrates how considerations of community spaces and cities as social entities increasingly infused CIAM debates--a result, in part, of transnational exchanges that began in the interwar era. In doing so, the study provides an exemplary case for applied transnational history.

The first chapter sketches the transnational development and composition of this group of modernist architects and planners, focusing on

the lack of consensus among various factions. CIAM was not an ideologically homogenous group and the much-invoked ideal of the "functionally separated city" emerges, in Domhardt's account, as a "myth" that was popularized by an unauthorized 1943 publication. To most CIAM members, the functionally divided city was much more an analytical tool than a point of prescriptive doctrine. While early CIAM debates focused heavily on housing as a central function of modern planning, this soon shifted by the early 1930s as many Central European CIAM members fled their home countries to the United Kingdom and the United States. Exile forced them to engage in an Atlantic debate on planning that was more holistically focused on neighborhood and community development.[3] Sigfried Giedion, Walter Gropius, José Louis Sert, Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, and the British MARS group feature as prominent protagonists in the ensuing CIAM discussions of the modern city, traced here for the later 1930s and into the 1940s.

The second chapter provides a broad survey of transatlantic debates about urban planning, paying particular attention to several dominant concepts. Rather than the rejection of existing traditions, Domhardt discusses the adaptation of ideas about decentralization and satellite cities in debates among CIAM members. The influential garden city movement features prominently alongside the emerging discussion of the neighborhood unit as a cornerstone for North American planning efforts. Early on, this study suggests, CIAM was open to sociologically infused conceptions of the city as a holistic entity that informed the growing shift towards urban and regional planning. Chicago school sociological theories that conceived of neighborhoods in relation to everyday activities and interactions as well as the work of urban theorist Lewis Mumford increasingly found their way into CIAM's transnational deliberations. The social complexity of planning that was absent from early CIAM conventions gained in importance throughout the 1930s.

Two subsequent chapters trace the impact of these ideas on leading CIAM members in North America and the United Kingdom and connect them to the practical experience of urban planning during the late 1930s and 1940s. Domhardt relates, for example, the impact of the idea of "organic neighborhood communities" in Gropius' work and the notion of the "human scale" in Luis Sert's writings. During World War II, planning for community spaces and civic centers became increasingly common. The MARS group, Britain's CIAM chapter, became particularly influential. Drawing on American efforts such as Greenbelt towns and the Regional Plan of New York as well as on sociological studies such as the Peckham experiment, they channeled comprehensive planning ideas into the layout of emerging New Towns, as a practical synthesis of preceding transatlantic planning debates.

The three postwar CIAM conventions are at the center of the last full chapter. As the planning community overcame wartime disruptions in communication, Le Corbusier and a few other continental planners attempted to return the focus on housing and to developing a prescriptive charter for postwar residential development. They were, however, largely marginalized. In their thrust, the postwar CIAM meetings between 1947 and 1951 reinforced the shift towards community-centered planning that conceptualized cities in a holistic rather than functionally separated manner. When the 1951 meeting in Hoddesdon focused on the city center as "the heart of the city," Domhardt concludes, this represented less a break with earlier discourses than a logical conclusion of the CIAM debates of the preceding twenty years.

A very short epilogue provides a sense of the legacy of the CIAM debates. Especially when compared to the level of minute detail provided in the preceding sections, this part could have benefited from more elaboration. Where does the author see the main contributions of the CIAM debates in

postwar architecture and how can we account for the apparent misconceptions and subsequent stereotyping of CIAM? Here, this reviewer would have wished for more strongly drawn connections to recent transnational accounts of the critique and decline of postwar urban renewal.[4] Still, to students of the history of urban planning, Domhardt's study will provide an immense wealth of new material and challenging interpretations.

For non-specialists interested in CIAM as an example of a transnational organization, a stronger effort to embed this study within the growing body of transnational literature in general and that on urban planning in particular would have been helpful. With organizations such as the IFHP (International Federation for Housing and Planning), the planning profession had been thoroughly internationalized since the early twentieth century and CIAM was only a small, if important, sliver of this transnational community and debate. And this debate was by no means limited to the Atlantic world. Domhardt rightfully makes nods to the Soviet experience, important Latin American projects, and the Japanese chapter of the organization, but a fully global assessment of the CIAM debates was understandably beyond the scope of this study. Still, a slightly wider geographic scope might have allowed Domhardt to situate CIAM more directly within current debates about high modernist attempts to fuse architecture and social engineering within the framework of the Atlantic West and beyond.[5] But this reviewer's wish list should not detract from what Domhardt has accomplished, an important reassessment of CIAM and a historical study that deftly sketches transnational debates and exchanges without losing sight of the various national contexts within which these debates were rooted.

Notes

[1]. Classic texts of that critique include Jane Jacobs,*The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: Random House, 1961); and Victor Gruen, *The Heart of Our Cities; The Urban Crisis: Diagnosis and Cure* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964).

[2]. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[3]. On the experience of émigré planners in the United States see also the dissertation in progress by Andreas Joch, "Dealing with the American City on Transnational Grounds: German-Speaking European Architects and Urban Planners in the United States, 1930-1980," in *GHI Bulletin Supplement* 8 (2012): 47-48.

[4]. See, for example, Christopher Klemek, *The Transatlantic Collapse of Urban Renewal: Postwar Urbanism from New York to Berlin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[5]. See, for example, David Kuchenbuch, *Geordnete Gemeinschaft: Architekten als Sozialingenieure - Deutschland und Schweden im 20. Jahrhundert* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2010).

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