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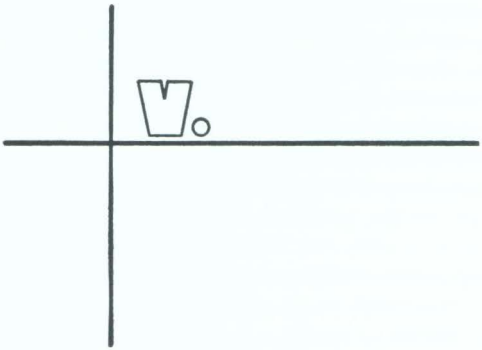


A Most Promising Start

Environment for Man. The Next Fifty Years, Edited by William R. Ewald, Jr.; Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, Pub. 1967. 308 pages.

This book, a modest compilation of source materials and ideas on environment and community, is the first of a series of three volumes to be issued by the American Institute of Planners (AIP). The projected series is intended to be a two-year national consultation to look into the THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS/1967-2017. This will be done through conferences. The aims of the conferences which have been planned are many. Those aims will be efforts to answer certain questions of interest to *most social and behavioral scientists.* Among the questions to which conferees will seek an answer are the following. (1) What can we expect the future environment of democracy to be, that is to say, how can the art and science of city planning be expanded so as to include the role of art, spirit, science and technology in creating the future environment of a democracy? (2) If we possessed an emerging technology and economy to build a proper environment and authentic communities for men, what would they be like? (3) How should we define an "ideal environment" which can be made possible by the onrush of new developments in science and technology? (4) What kind of environments can facilitate what might be consensually spoken of as a "good day"? (5) *In principle,* is it possible to define and then construct in our time an *optimum environment with man as its measure?* (6) What are the proper criteria for evaluating past professional planning successes and failures? (7) How can we redefine *pragmatism* so that it will refer not only to something that works now but also *something that will work in the future?* The reason for posing this last objective

is that much of the membership of the AIP, and the other professional organizations which are cooperating on these planned conferences, is now convinced of the practical importance and genuine possibility of looking ahead and planning for our national and regional futures. They share the attitudes of such persons as the members of the *Commission On The Year 2000* and of Bertrand De Jouvenel, a pioneer in the new field of studies concerned with projections of the future, particularly by the means which De Jouvenel laid down in his *The Art Of Conjecture.*

Part I of the planned series is devoted to defining what is meant by an optimum environment. Part II, the next volume, will be aimed at articulating an appropriate social philosophy for the next 50 years—a social philosophy aimed at creating a pluralistic society in which the fate, contentment and authentic development of the individual will be paramount and in which freedom and responsibility can be guaranteed for all. This will have to be social philosophy geared to the new and emerging possibilities for man's environment; possibilities which are rooted to the coming, new developments in science and technology. In addition, this second volume will try to achieve an understanding of the values of our society and the great changes which lie ahead for it, and that volume will propose specific policies and programs that *must* be considered if these kinds of understanding are, in fact, valid. Part III, the third volume, will furnish the contributions from, and the results of, six to ten regional conferences which will subsequently be called to refine and test the conclusions arrived at in the second volume.

It is intended that all three volumes will include relevant non-empirical as well as definitive, empirical data. The creative policies and programs to be proposed in Part II will lean heavily upon the resources of computer technology. In addition, conferees intend to make all three volumes truly "interdisciplinary." They will be interdisciplinary not in the sense of merely juxtaposing findings from the specialized disciplines, which is the commonplace, antiquated, mongrelized and now dysfunctional version of the term, "interdisciplinary," but rather in the sense of developing *hitherto unseen relationships* among the findings of the special disciplines, relationships which will have a direct bearing upon the aims of all three of the conferences. The interdisciplinary approach will carry the additional meaning of applying methodologies and modes of analysis, usually employed in other types of context, to the objectives of the conferees. The nature of such methodology deserves some slight expansion at this point.

One such methodology, for instance, is what has come to be called the *matrix approach* and is an attempt to enumerate in tabular, matrix form all those variables which are important components of the environment, particularly in relation to community planning. These

variables are set up, using the matrix approach, so as to be able to develop empirically (and, if need be, theoretically) the *functional relationships* among them. If, then, there are meaningful combinations of some of these variables, they can be found by the technique known as principal component analysis. By this technique it is also possible to locate clusters of variables which vary simultaneously, so that thereafter the matrix can be subjected to factor analysis. If it is desired to reduce the large number of variables to a set of fewer and more basic components, that can be done by the application of certain types of correlation analysis. Optimal solutions to achieving communities exhibiting given attributes, but where the expressions of these attributes are subject to various types of constraint, involve what is called a Trade-Off Matrix (Relation of Function to Function), and these optimal solutions can be achieved by such sophisticated mathematical and statistical techniques as interactive matrix manipulation, simulation and random sampling.

The editor of the volume stresses the consideration that the purposes of the conferences are based upon the recognition of the following fact. As a result of our growing social complexity, planners and social scientists are finding it harder and harder to understand the natural as well as the artifactual environments of men. Ewald suggests that there are four reasons for our impoverished understanding of the human environment. These reasons are the following. (1) Increasing population and population density make it too risky to try to deal with the human environment by trial and error, since both the social and the monetary costs are becoming too great. (2) The market is growing so large and the state of the housing industry is so decrepit that there is now an opportunity for profit for many different industries in new concepts of environment. (3) The achievements of our affluent society have created a new human environment, accompanied by social pathologies whose elimination is creating major, political attention and conflict of interest. (4) Because of the possibilities inherent in computer technology, planners, politicians and the educated and concerned public, now can study and treat our socially and physically unwieldy environment as a system of multivariable, complex relationships. The ability to do this makes it possible for man to adapt his environment to a creative and satisfying social philosophy in contrast to the traditional ecological approach in which man is expected to adapt or resign himself to the environment as given. The reader should note that, if this fourth assertion is sound, then the pessimism shown by Jacques Ellul in his book, *The Technological Society*, in which this author declared that man could not escape the pathological imperatives of technology, can be cheerfully dismissed.

At this point, then, it will be most appropriate to select some of

the more interesting papers from the volume and provide brief synopses of their content.

The papers contributed are highly varied. René Dubos deals with the need for a new science of environmental biomedicine. John W. Dyckman discusses the concept of an optimum environment for modern man. Christopher Alexander furnishes a penetrating analysis of what he calls the *autonomy-withdrawal syndrome,* that is, the behavior which results in loss of intimate contact and the complex of urban factors which produce that syndrome. Bertram M. Gross predicts the appearance of regional megalopoli, followed by a single, polynuclear supermegalopolis. He rejects our present model of city living—the City of Things—based upon high mass-consumption. He discusses at length the model that must replace it, the City of Man or Anthropolis, the city in which there will not be *fewer* things but *more things that truly serve human interests* and which will restore *gemeinschaft* to the post-industrial age. Stanley J. Hallet discusses the important topic of planning and politics and W. L. Rogers discusses the value of the applications of interdisciplinary methodolgy—systems theory and environmental science—to society and city planning. For Rogers the effectiveness of the systems approach in city planning will depend to a considerable degree on the ability of planners and social scientists to define operationally such concepts as "health," "convenience," "esthetics" and "happiness." The volume also includes three papers devoted to theory governing the form, structure, physical appearance, neighborhood design and functions of the urban center and which are also addressed, at the same time, to the *technical* problems of dealing with these attributes. These all reflect the city planner's traditional concern with the physical exploitation of space and with the relation of physical space to cultural space. A separate paper deals with the role of business and investment in changing the human environment.

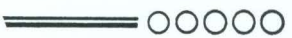
This volume does not, by any means, contain the answers to the problems it poses. In fact, whatever answers are to be supplied will come, of course, in the next two volumes. Even, however, within the framework of its more restricted purposes, it has deficiencies—as any volume does on any subject. I should like to mention only two of these deficiencies here and I am mentioning these two only because they are so central to the improvement of environment for man.

The first deficiency is that the contributors to the first conference did not focus attention upon the fact that all the errors now being made in determining the increasingly dysgenic nature of the American environment, are being currently intensified. They are being intensified by industry, by land speculators, real-estate operators and developers, the automobile manufacturers, the traditional types of planners of the physical city, by highway engineers, by the construction industry

and by all the other human and institutional sources that can justifiably be listed on any roster of culprits. As a result—and this is the point—the American environment may be brought to a state where there will be a point of no return, a point at which the most practical and idealistic plans will not have a ghost of a chance of being adapted to the mess we have made of things. We need community plans as well as plans for environmental control, all of which are aimed at unscrambling such messes in the future, regardless of their nature and extent. Such plans would be contingency measures against the time when the public finally wakes up, cries "enough" and asks that our planners begin all over again. You will find no such "cushion-plans" dealt with at all as antidotes towards the ugly future to which we seem to be moving, if present decision-makers, with respect to community construction and planning, remain in the saddle. This neglect should, of course, be repaired in the forthcoming conferences and volumes.

The second deficiency is the complete failure, due to lack of venturesomeness on the part of all of the contributors, to consider planning in relation to a *philosophy of decentralization* instead of thinking of planning almost solely in terms of the centralizing and bureaucratizing trends of the times. Many new developments in science and technology, such as those described in the 1963 NASA publication, *Conference On Space, Science, And Urban Life,* are peculiarly adaptable to small-scale, physically decentralized communities and to small-scale, controlled environments. Many inventions, scientific developments and new technologies, brought into being in connection with such contexts as space exploration and technology, oceanographic exploration and research, and new planetary communications technologies, are cases in point. So too are some of the results of research on cyborgs and bioengineering, the use of Buckminster Fuller's innovations via the Dymazion principle and the geodesic dome, organized developments of eco-systems and dozens of other recent and important developments too numerous to mention here. All such recent developments may prove to be more serviceable in the development of small-scale, physically and socially decentralized communities, than in the development of the highly centralized megalopoli and supermegalopoli that Gross foresees. The relevance and applicability of such developments to architecture and community planning has been explicitly recognized in the publication, *2000+,* which is a reprint of the British journal, *Architectural Design* (February, 1967). Then, too, the use of systems analysis—which the contributors to this volume make so much of—can be even more successful in less complex, small-scale systems, such as those expressed by a scientifically designed, highly efficient, decentralized community, than in the large and socially complex systems (regions) which the contributors had in mind in

producing this volume. Nevertheless, the possibilities for scientifically decentralized and controlled communities and environments have been completely neglected by the contributors. Here, too, we can only hope that this negligence will be repaired in the forthcoming conferences and volumes.

But when all is said and done, this book is a most promising start in the direction of the aims and objectives of the planned conferences to which we referred at the beginning of this review. One really has to read the volume to appreciate it and to realize the importance of methodology in the design of improved environments for man. The authors, on the whole, reflect the best of C. P. Snow's two cultures, in their personal outlooks. The quality of mind and the cultural outlook which should be brought to bear upon the pleasant task of reading this volume are most likely to be a product of training in the social and behavioral sciences, underwritten by a genuine sensitivity to our humanist traditions. The quality that is least likely to fit the reader for a proper appreciation of this volume, is to be a prisoner of historical perspective. This is why, perhaps, the volume was blindly and incomprehendingly treated by J. H. Plumb, the British historian, in *Saturday Review* (July 29, 1967), so much so that the editor of the volume had to complain in a later issue of that same journal. The volume has no place in the hands of the negative classicist, that is, the smug scholar with a cryptic distaste for the role and relevance of methodology and a preference for the well-turned phrase, as the proper method of illuminating all our difficulties. This is the scholar who thinks the answers to all problems, really, are to be found embedded somewhere in the realm of classical learning and that they will surely be found there if only we look carefully enough.

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