



Planning through Conflict: Competing Approaches in British Post-War Reconstruction.

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This paper describes disagreements between local government officers in Sheffield (UK) in the early 1940s and argues that these rivalries are indicative of competing approaches to urban planning in Britain during this period.

In December 1940, Sheffield's city centre was severely damaged in an air raid. Subsequent efforts to devise a plan for reconstruction initially centered on the Diagonal Road Scheme, a proposal to create a grand boulevard from Sheffield's main railway station to the city centre. However, efforts to incorporate this scheme into a larger plan for the city failed when relations between the city's Technical Officers broke down.

Concluding that the Technical Officers could no longer be expected to work together, the City Council organized a competition between the city's Planning Officer, the City Engineer, the City Architect, and a local lobby group, to select a scheme for the city centre. Herbert Manzoni, Birmingham's City Engineer and Surveyor, acted as judge and in May 1944 he declared a scheme by Sheffield's City Engineer to be the winning entry. Feeling his authority had been undermined, the Planning Officer promptly resigned. With the City Engineer, John Collie, appointed in his place, the winning scheme served as the basis for subsequent post-war development in Sheffield.

The winning scheme, and its predecessor the Diagonal Road Scheme, can be regarded as representative of competing approaches to urban planning. The Diagonal Road Scheme featured axial layouts, with straight boulevards terminated by monuments and symmetrical urban spaces. The intention was to create a spatial hierarchy, suggesting that the scheme's authors prioritized spatial experience. However, the plan displayed little appreciation of contemporary traffic engineering techniques.

By contrast, the principal feature of Collie's scheme was a proposed network of arterial roads, intended to reduce traffic congestion and improve road safety through the segregation of vehicles and pedestrians. However, little serious consideration was given to the probable spatial experience of the scheme, with proposals considered in the abstract. Moreover, little thought was given to how buildings would be integrated with the scheme, and the proposed road network created many awkward-shaped building plots.

Rivalry between Technical Officers can be partly attributed to the relatively recent introduction of specialist town planners. In Sheffield, prior to 1936 the City Engineer had been responsible for town planning. Education was another factor, and splits often reflected a planner's training. During this period, planners often trained in one of the more established disciplines such as architecture, engineering or surveying prior to studying for qualifications in town planning. Planners with a background in architecture were more likely to consider the spatial qualities of a scheme than those whose background was in engineering. However, the latter were better placed to implement the Government's traffic engineering policies, promoted in circulars issued by the Ministry of Transport since 1930. Collie's scheme won precisely because it complied with these policies, but the aspects of his scheme which were implemented resulted in a poor experience for pedestrians.

KEY WORDS: Planning history, Sheffield, post-war reconstruction, 1940s, Herbert Manzoni, and John Collie.