



The Changing Concept of the Urban: Reading Planning History through Present Urban Notions, the Case of Patrick Geddes in Tel Aviv

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Future planning often starts in the past. Planning reports supply a description of the city's planned history, culminating with previous professional successes, and the sub-discipline of Planning History is flourishing. However, while acknowledging the importance of studying the past for its own sake, such readings tend to be generally positive and monolithic, raising the question: When we tell a historical story in planning, which pasts do we choose to dwell on, and why? Moreover, when we wish the present (or as planners, the future) to be more like the past, what exactly are we aiming for?

This paper interrogates the planning history of Tel Aviv, the First Hebrew City planned and built in Palestine (later, Israel). One of the planning heroes of the city is the celebrated Patrick Geddes, who prepared the first official plan for the city in 1925. The current notion of Geddes' plan, generally reflecting his appreciation as a planner since about the 1970's, considers him as a unique and a sensitive planner, who tended to the needs of the local population and who managed to produce a plan which encapsulated the aspirations of the community, its heritage and its prospects. Thus, although Tel Aviv has grown dramatically both in size and in numbers since Geddes' sojourn, the plan today is still hailed as the iconic image of the successful modern city and many of its merits are accredited to Geddes' vision. In fact, of all Tel Aviv's planners over the years, Geddes is the only one known to the public, and celebrated in any way as can be seen in the in the centenary celebrations of the city, now coming to an end. Moreover, these notions are prominent in the attempts for future development, as present planners try to decipher Geddes' local planning elements in a process which resembles uncovering the plan's DNA in order to savor and reproduce it. However, it seems as if the constant reference to Geddes' contribution to the city stands in complete opposition to the lack of research regarding his plan and overall work in Palestine.

In this paper I claim that the manifested changes regarding Geddes' role in the history of Tel Aviv reflect most of all changes in the city's official biography. Moreover, I argue that Geddes' plan is used by contemporary planners in order to strengthen current planning notions and to pave the way to future plans. The paper thus traces the way Geddes' plan and the city's narrative have been intertwined over the years, finally showing the important role Geddes' plan has received in recent planning as an image of the city and perpetuated through current planning.

KEY WORDS: Patrick Geddes, Tel Aviv, orientalism, planning myth, critical readings.