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From Page to Policy: Camillo Sitte and Planning Practice in Munich.

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## From Page to Policy: Camillo Sitte and Planning Practice in Munich

This article investigates how a set of ideas and concerns about the nature of modern society and the modern city were converted into a corpus of practical principles for city planning in early twentieth century Germany. It investigates the ways that buildings and spaces relate to ideas and programmes: the path from page, to plan, to physical space. It focuses on the ideas of Camillo Sitte, a much overlooked figure in the history of thought on urban space, and particularly his 1889 work *Der Städtebau nach seinen Künstlerischen Grundsätzen* – ‘City-Building According to its Artistic Principles’,<sup>1</sup> and the way these ideas were used to produce physical spaces in Munich.

In focusing on Sitte’s ideas and the ways they were realised in Munich, the article also addresses itself to a disjunction identified by Carl Abbott, and alluded to by several others in the recent special issue of *Planning History* on the theme, between ‘planning’ history on the one hand, and history ‘proper’ on the other. In particular, Abbott suggests that planning historians have been reluctant to use the evidence at their disposal to resolve some of the issues which preoccupy ‘mainstream’ historians, and urban historians in particular: issues like class, identity formation, value systems, gender and modernity.<sup>2</sup> This article investigates Sitte’s attitudes towards a Central European emerging metropolitan modernity at the turn of the last century, and shows how his views of this modernisation process, and the threats and benefits that it contained, could nourish the spatial formation of a large city like Munich for over the thirty years after their publication. Thus the mutually constitutive nature of ‘imagined’ planning discourse and ‘real’ planning practice can be highlighted. The interplay of real and imagined is one often asserted in contemporary cultural history practice. As James Donald has asked:

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<sup>1</sup> The conventional translation for *Städtebau* is the more prosaic ‘town planning’, but this preserves none of the dynamism of the German word, which translates literally as ‘city building.’

<sup>2</sup> C. Abbott, ‘Urban history for planners’, *Journal of Planning History* 4 (2006), 301-313.

If the city is an imagined environment, and modernity is an attitude more than it is an epoch, then what have been the dominant images and metaphors through which the modern city has been mediated? And, then, how have those images and metaphors shaped both the fabric and the experience of the modern city? The argument I make in this chapter is that ways of seeing and understanding the city inevitably inform ways of acting on the space of the city, with consequences which then in turn produce a modified city which is again seen, understood and acted on. It is not just that the boundaries between reality and imagination are fuzzy and porous. In the development of cities can be discerned a traffic between the two, an economy of symbolic constructs which have material consequences that are manifested in an enduring reality.<sup>3</sup>

All too often, however, the subsequent historical investigation is too reliant on ‘discourse’ and ‘imaginaries’, and too tentative about staking claims for reality beyond that. This article aims to trace a direct line between a discourse, and a set of physical, ‘real’ spaces.

Furthermore, while Sitte is not a figure who sits completely outside the canon of planning ‘giants’ (be they movements or individuals), he is often overlooked in planning history,<sup>4</sup> and the central arguments that he made are often not fully understood, or highly simplified.<sup>5</sup> While an article like this cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of his ideas, it is important to foreground his thinking because, far from being a historical curiosity, Sitte was an author of deep significance for planning practice in Central Europe, and one who would have far-reaching influence on planning discourse

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<sup>3</sup> James Donald, *Imagining the Modern City* (London, 1999), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Despite the work of G. Collins and C. Crasemann Collins (*Camillo Sitte and the Birth of Modern City Planning* (London, 1965)), it is only recently that the Sitte’s influence is receiving the historical attention it deserves. See: M. Mönninger, *Vom Ornament zum Nationalkunstwerk. Zur Kunst- und Architekturtheorie Camillo Sittes* (Braunschweig, 1998); K. Wilhelm, D. Jessen-Klingenberg, *Formationen der Stadt: Camillo Sitte weitergelesen* (Berlin, 2006); Klaus Semsroth, K. Jormakka, B. Langer (eds.), *Kunst des Städtebaus: Neue Perspektiven auf Camillo Sitte* (Vienna, 2005). His complete works are currently being collected and edited by Klaus Semsroth, Michael Mönninger and Christiane Crasemann-Collins.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, David Frisby, ‘Straight or Crooked Streets? The Contested Rational Spirit of the Modern Metropolis’, in Iain Boyd White (ed.), *Modernism and the Spirit of the City* (London, 2003), 57-84, which rather reduces Sitte’s thinking to little more than an obsession with ‘cuteness’ and nostalgia. Karl Schorske uses him as a retrograde, conservative foil to highlight the achievements of Otto Wagner in *Fin de Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (London, 1980).

in German-speaking Europe (and beyond) throughout the twentieth century, up to and including the work of influential contemporary urbanists, like Leon Krier.<sup>6</sup>

The first section summarizes the most important of Sitte's ideas, in terms of their impact on practical planning decisions. It tries to 'rescue' Sitte from the charges of backward-looking, anti-modern nostalgia that have sometimes characterised his appearance in the literature, by showing how very 'modern' (in the sense of rational, systematic, bureaucratic, improving) he seemed to contemporaries. The second section moves on to show how these ideas might begin to leave the page, and emerge into a physical urban form. It shows how these ideas were used by the city's planners in a central feature of their planning and building strategy in the 1900s: the enormous school building programme to which they committed themselves. Munich's administrators in education and town planning worked together to reconstruct the school curriculum, and therefore the school building, and therefore the environment in which the building stood (in fact, the curriculum which emerged in Munich in the 1890s is the model which has made German education, both technical and liberal, so influential in the world today). The third section takes the longer view, exploring how these ideas became embedded in a 'spatial culture' which had profound influence on the organisation of social intervention after the Great War. It illustrates how Sitte's vocabulary and anxieties underpinned the main focus of 1920s planning – housing – showing that while Sitte himself may not have been the most referenced author in this period, the underlying structures of his thinking were deeply embedded in practical planning decisions. In following this line, the goal is to challenge historians of architecture and planning to pay more attention to the ways that the writers (for most architects and planners are studied more for their words, rather than their buildings or spaces) which populate the 'canon' of writing on building influenced the mainstream of planning practice. Too much academic ink has been spilled for too long on buildings which are 'good', and

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<sup>6</sup> Michelle Thompson-Fawcett, 'Leon Krier and the Organic Revival within Urban Policy and Practice', *Planning Perspectives* 19 (1998), 167-194; 'A New Urbanist Diffusion Network: The Americo-European Connection', *Built Environment* 3 (2003), 253-270; J. Moughtin, *Urban Design: Street and Square* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn. Oxford, 2003), 80 ff.

which have influenced the ‘discourse’ of architects and architecture, but whose influence has not been profound on the mainstream of very banal buildings which shape construction both as an economic, cultural and social activity.

### **Camillo Sitte and Modern City Planning in German-Speaking Europe**

Sitte was the influential director of the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna in the 1880s, and although a trained architect, he never went into architectural practice. He was, however, an energetic publicist, journalist, essay writer and government advisor. His twin obsessions were: firstly, the comparison of the modern city with the urban spaces, forms, functions and proportions of older cities; and secondly, the emotional, spiritual life of the modern urbanite. From these twin obsessions came a book, *City Building According to its Artistic Principles*, in 1889. The book was an overnight success throughout Central Europe, reprinted sixteen times in the next six years. It is written in graceful, engaging, involving German, and always proceeds by demonstrating mastery of the technical aspects of planning before going on to offer devastating critiques of the way humans responded to “rationally”-produced spaces. It effectively demolished the logic which underpinned the Haussmannesque planning paradigm of the late nineteenth century, and remains a convincing assault on the sufficiency of reason alone to produce happiness or contentment. Through its adoption as a planning “bible” throughout the Austro-Hungarian and German Empires, it transformed both the perception of urban space in Central Europe, as well as the physical realities of how that space would be produced and arranged. It provided a shared reference point for critiques of urban form across the middle of the continent, and embedded it in the apparatus of the state, local, regional and imperial.

Central to the book’s critique of the ‘rationalism’ of the American grid, or Parisian or Viennese radial systems, stood a thoroughly *rational* critique of two aspects in particular. Far from using an irrational nostalgia to attack formal rationalism, Sitte embraced the technical-administrative

language of his opponents to demolish them. First of all, Sitte demonstrated how these grid/radial plans produced enormous traffic problems by focussing enormous knots of broad, intersecting thoroughfares. They did this in two ways: the radial system focused large streets on individual points, such as the Etoile in Paris. The grid system made it impossible to drive anywhere in a straight line, meaning that constant zigzags of left-right turns were necessary to go from point to point – or large right-angle detours. Thus, ‘so-called’ rational systems actually impeded the free flow of goods and people, a central objective of nineteenth-century bourgeois urban design. Second, he focussed on the enormous expense of ignoring established patterns of land ownership and environmental features: living with small plots and banks, rivulets and hills was far more profitable, he argued, than constantly revising them. The reconstruction of Paris had been predicated on a vast extension of state power through a total forced revision of land ownership in the interests of the new banks; Wren’s plans for London (which he liked) were rendered irrelevant by the refusal/incapacity of the British state to do the same. Thus, the ‘crooked streets’ of the pre-modern town, as well as the tightly structured squares of the Baroque one, were seen by him as the means to modern ends (the effective execution of capitalism, efficient circulation of goods, the psychological well-being of the citizen, public order). They were not, he insisted, anti-modern, nostalgic, reactionary yearnings for a by-gone age. Crooked streets were *not* an end in themselves, but a means of improving traffic circulation and land exploitation.

Crucially, Sitte and his large band of disciples in German-speaking Europe<sup>7</sup> defined the city not just as a series of technical problems such as sewerage, transport, and health, but allied these with a

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<sup>7</sup> This ‘band’ was extensive and hugely influential, incorporating planners of substantial influence, such as Karl Henrici and Theodor Fischer. Fischer was for a time a planner for Munich city council, and went on to train urbanists such as JJP Oud and Le Corbusier. On Fischer and his influence, see S. Fisch, ‘Theodor Fischer in München (1893-1901) – der Stadtplaner auf dem Weg zum Beamten’, in E. Mai, H. Pohl, S. Waetzold (eds.), *Kunstpolitik und Kunstförderung im Kaiserreich: Kunst im Wandel der Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Berlin, 1982), 245-259; *Stadtplanung im 19. Jahrhundert: Das Beispiel München bis zur Ära Theodor Fischer* (Munich, 1988); ‘Neue Aspekte der Münchener Stadtplanung zur Zeit Theodor Fischers (1893 bis 1901) im interurbanen Vergleich’, in W. Hardtwig, K. Tenfelde (eds.), *Soziale Räume in der Urbanisierung: Studien zur Geschichte Münchens im Vergleich 1850 – 1933*, (Munich, 1990) 175-191; W. Nerdinger, *Theodor Fischer: Architekt und Städtebauer, 1862-1938* (Berlin, 1988).

series of emotional and experiential features of urban life – loneliness, confusion, over-stimulation, agoraphobia, privacy, thrill-seeking, freedom.<sup>8</sup> He was not alone: development of contemporary discourse in sociology and psychology also sought to explain the distinctive features of the impact of the modern city on the internal life of the individual, the most famous example of which in current urban history and cultural studies discourse is Georg Simmel’s essay, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’.<sup>9</sup> He emphasised that there was a certain ‘end of history’ to the technical side of planning, claiming that the major technical problems (such as clean water supply or lighting) had been solved, and merely awaited applications of the solutions. While he often worked from ancient, mediaeval, and baroque models, he also pleaded that we start planning for the “*Millionenstadt*”, which would grow over the next fifty years. He staked bold claims for what planning should do:

Planning [*Der Städtebau*] is the union of all technical and applied arts into one large, complete whole; planning is the monumental expression of the true pride of citizens, and the seed-bed of true love for the *Heimat*; planning regulates traffic, arranges the foundations of healthy and comfortable living of the vast majority of people – modern people – who have moved to big cities; it must cultivate and accommodate industry and trade, and must support the reconciliation of social conflicts.<sup>10</sup>

The German word for planning, *Städtebau*, translates literally as ‘city building’, and is therefore capable of sustaining a far greater rhetorical presence than the English ‘town planning’, which lacks the dynamic urban, constructive attributes of the German. Central to Sitte’s discussion was the concept of *Heimat*, a notoriously difficult word to translate. At its most basic level, it means emotional homeland, the geographical place in which one might see one’s character reflected, the landscape to which one might look for one’s own spatial and cultural conditioning. While some commentators have focused on Sitte’s use of old examples, thereby branding him a reactionary or nostalgic, they have glossed over this bold set of ambitions which rings through his whole work;

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<sup>8</sup> Karin Wilhelm, ‘Ordnungsmuster der Stadt: Camillo Sitte und der moderne Städtebaudiskurs’, in Wilhelm (ed.), *Formationen der Stadt*, 34-65.

<sup>9</sup> A good introduction to the pervasiveness of this metaphor is Joachim Radkau, *Das Zeitalter der Nervosität: Deutschland zwischen Bismarck und Hitler* (Munich, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Camillo Sitte, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen* (Vienna, 1971 [3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 1901]), p. xix.

ambitions which were expert, governmental, statist, helping, reforming and regulatory – ambitions which were, in short, modern.

Sitte's emphasis on the "emotional life of planning" implied a revolution in both the training of the experts who managed urban life, and the application of their knowledge. Experts (and here Sitte singled out his nemesis, Reinhard Baumeister, professor of engineering at Karlsruhe, and his standard 1876 text book *Urban Growth in its Technical, Regulatory and Economic Dimensions*<sup>11</sup>) had previously applied algorithms to determine, say, the width of a street in relation to the anticipated volume of traffic using it. Criticising "our mathematically encircled modern life, in which man himself becomes formally a machine," (p. 115) Sitte argued instead that:

It is not true that modern traffic forces us to do this; it is not true that hygiene makes all this necessary. It is simply thoughtlessness, complacency and lack of good will which condemns us modern city dwellers to a life sentence in shapeless areas for the masses consisting of views of endlessly repetitious tenements, in endlessly repetitious geometric street alignments. They kill the soul, they kill pride, they kill all sense of belonging...<sup>12</sup>

Besides providing a rhetorical drive to stimulate bureaucrats, experts, urban governors and cultural critics to change the way city space was conceived, Sitte provided a carefully worked-out methodology which, if followed, should produce a series of urban spaces which would comfort the citizen, instil in them a sense of wholeness, and make them feel that they belonged to the city and that – crucially – the city belonged to them. They would do this while maintaining the underlying structures of the capitalist city. He wanted to destroy the infinite vistas of the city of Haussmann, and replace them with a city consisting of a series of rooms, through which the citizen moved, always able to locate him- or herself as a person, both social and individual, and always enjoying the comfort of defined space. The form of the city, he argued, should be about enclosure and density

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<sup>11</sup> *Stadt-Erweiterungen in technischer, baupolizeilicher und wirtschaftlicher Beziehung* (Leipzig, 1876).

<sup>12</sup> Sitte, *Der Städtebau*, p. 144.

of settlement. The purpose of the city was about social reconciliation, psychological well-being, personal satisfaction.

In the period immediately before the First World War, such concerns were hugely popular in public debate in most areas of life – whether discussing the rise of socialism and the ‘social question’, the ‘woman question’, the nature of the state, the merits (or otherwise) of the free market, and what went on in the human mind. They were taken seriously by urban governors, administrators and bureaucrats keen to stave off the disaffection which they assumed produced the problems that troubled them most in their administrative remits: alcoholism, illegitimacy, tuberculosis and other contagious disease control, mental health, education, incest, women’s rights, socialism and the ‘social question’. These were expensive problems for administrators, and solutions which promised to address the root causes of things like socialism, despair, mental and physical ill-health would be attractive to them. Sitte’s ideas seemed to them to offer a way of addressing this, because they united the technical aspects of planning with humane claims for a humane set of spatial experiences. Thus Sitte’s followers – like Karl Henrici – were enormously successful in the Austro-Hungarian and German Empires before the First World War. Throughout the period, an underlying interest in the selfhood and emotional integrity of the individual was central to planning philosophy in the two empires, and it is to this interest which I would now like to turn, for this interest was no passing object of curiosity for contemporaries, but underpinned their spatial policies for years to come.

### **Municipal Government and the Emotional Life of the Citizen**

Few planning documents start with anything as useful to the historian as a summary of the underlying anxieties which stimulated the local state into activity. Thus in the case of Munich in the period before the Great War, there is little clear evidence from the archives about why the corporation set about so vigorously trying to describe, regulate and manipulate the shape and form of the city after its urban design competition in 1893. However, from the mid-1890s onward, the

corporation began to regulate space and produce it through building on an unprecedented scale, and in a tightly consistent ideological way. The cities administrators – mayors, youth workers, hygiene inspectors and the like– also began to analyse and describe the city in a way remarkably consistent with Sitte’s ideas. In promotional literature written by the Munich Corporation for a major festival organised in 1908 to celebrate the city’s 750<sup>th</sup> anniversary, one of the contributors commented, “Our age sickens with hurry and body- and soul-rotting nervousness. Superficiality and lust for pleasure are the signature of everyday life. [...] This is a universal: in commerce, in industry, in art. The same goes for the care of the soul and the body.”<sup>13</sup> A clearer formulation of the underlying problem one could not wish for, and on face value, seemingly anti-modern and anti-urban. And yet such an anti-modern diagnosis would be inappropriate, because planners and governors inside the Munich Corporation singled out very specific features of the experiential lives of the modern urbanite for attention, rather than making generalised anti-urban critiques. Crucially, it seems they had every confidence in being able to improve the situation with thoroughly modern means: they did not seek to condemn modernity in its bureaucratic, rationalising, generalising forms, but reform it. In particular, they focused on a lack of a sense of belonging (*Heimatlosigkeit*), the splintering and inconsistency of urban forms (*Stadtbildzersplitterung*), and the clumping together of individuals into characterless masses (*Menschenzusammenballung*). For each of these emotional challenges to the modern subject, they posited spatial solutions which would cosset the individual, reconcile him or her to the helping projects of the modern state, and make modernity and urban life seem warm and fulfilling. They posited no retreat from modernity or the city, only rational technocratic management to manipulate its more problematic aspects.

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<sup>13</sup>Hans Uebel, “Der Sport auf der Ausstellung ‘München 1908’”, *Ausstellung “München 1908”*, 3 January 1908, p. 17. Stadtarchiv München [SAM] – Nachlass Grässel [NLG]-408.

## Placelessness

Sitte had elucidated clearly how he felt that “mathematically encircled” planning had destroyed the individual’s instinctive sense of attachment to place. He wrote:

The size of blocks and the width of streets are generally agreed at some sort of committee meeting. Once that is done, the actual details of the layout are decided by bureaucrats and clerks, assuming that there is not to be any real artistic input. The artistic value of the plan is thereby nil, and therefore the joy of the inhabitant in their city is also nil, their attachment to it is nil, their pride in it is nil – in one word, their entire sense of belonging [*Heimatgefühl*] is nil, and one can actually observe this in any inhabitant of any of the new, artless, boring cities.<sup>14</sup>

This anxiety about *Heimat* – place and placelessness – was a common trope in German discussions about culture, society and nationhood at the time, and remains important today.<sup>15</sup> If the experience of urban space corroded *Heimatgefühl*, this would indeed be a serious problem.

Public discourse and experts in Germany before the First World War made frequent references to *Heimat*, and the ways in which cities and urban life tended to undermine it. In the city of Munich, Mayor Borscht of the Centre Party made the mission to create a sense of *Heimat* a major plank of the city’s social policy, outlining in 1900 the goals of his controversial subsidies for social housing:

We intend that through safer and more comfortable housing, especially amongst the growing youth of this city, the feeling for the *Heimat* will be won back and strengthened, and that thereby the growing youth criminality problems will be most effectively tackled. [Underlining in original]<sup>16</sup>

The lack of a sense of *Heimat*, the failure of the metropolis to function as *Heimat*, was thought to account for many of the difficulties experienced by urbanising societies if the governors and

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<sup>14</sup> Sitte, *Der Städtebau*, p. 144.

<sup>15</sup> For an introduction and discussion of the origins and character of the *Heimat* discourse, see the collection of essays *Antimodernismus und Reform: Zur Geschichte der deutschen Heimatbewegung*, ed. Edeltraud Klueting (Darmstadt, 1991). See also: Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley, CA, 1991), and especially the essays in M. Umbach, B. Hüppauf (eds.), *Vernacular Modernism: Heimat, Globalization, and the Built Environment* (London, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> An die hohe Kammer der Abgeordneten. Betreff: Bitte des Vereins für Verbesserung der Wohnungsverhältnisse in München (a. Verein) um Gewährung staatlicher Unterstützung. 5 January, 1900. SAM/Wohnungsamt [WA] 23.

bureaucrats of the Corporation are to be believed, and here, almost directly quoting from Sitte, Borscht linked it causally to juvenile delinquency. The question which remained was how restructuring urban space could remedy the deficiencies the mayor and Sitte identified. Examples of attempts on the part of the Corporation to formulate “real” responses abound, from streets to schools, markets to hospitals, flats to old people’s homes, but in the present context, one specific example of how the Stadtbauamt – the city planning office – translated these ideas into reality will have to suffice.

From the mid-1890s until 1914, the City embarked on a major programme of school construction, accompanying a pragmatic reform of the curriculum. This curriculum is still the basis of German education at primary and secondary level; it focused on small-class teaching, the integration of sport and school meals into the day; the introduction of technical/workshop education; and the introduction of ‘child protection’ into the school – whether in the forms of showers, de-lousing stations, or inspections of children for physical bruising. These reforms required a totally new school-house form, with workshops, kitchens, dining halls, shower blocks, gymnasia, smaller classrooms, private medical rooms. Social reform and building reform went hand in hand. The construction of so many schools – 33 in twenty years – would offer the planners an ideal opportunity to do two things: firstly, visually orientate the city towards grandiose symbols of modernity, rationality, progress and beneficent state provision of services; and secondly, generate a series of spaces within the city which would immerse the developing child in spatial experiences felt best to engender a love for *Heimat*.

Georg Simmel’s famous essay on the psychological impact of urban modernity, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” commented on precisely this first aspect:

... the person resists being levelled down and worn out by a social-technological mechanism. An inquiry into the inner meaning of specifically modern life and its

products, into the soul of the cultural body, so to speak, must seek to solve the equation which structures like the metropolis set up between the individual and the super-individual contents of life. Such an inquiry must answer the question of how the personality accommodates itself in the adjustments to external forces.<sup>17</sup>

The school would be just one of the “social-technological mechanisms” of modern existence established to manage the relationship between “the individual and the supra-individual contents of life.” I use Simmel here as a historical example, a contemporary of Sitte, and fairly typical of turn-of-the-century European urban social enquiry. It was this relational-procedural aspect which German bureaucrats sought to address. Indeed, Simmel, in the same essay, singled out rational state buildings as agents in this process of mediation, pointing out that, “Here in buildings and educational institutions, in the wonders and comforts of space-conquering technology, in the formations of community life, and in the visible institutions of the state, is offered such an overwhelming fullness of crystallized and impersonalized spirit that the personality, so to speak, cannot maintain itself under its impact.”<sup>18</sup>

Again, the value is not that someone as famous or central to urban studies as Simmel said it, but that he echoed popular concerns and themes. The chief bureaucrat and architect in charge of school building for the Corporation of Munich was Hans Grässer, a man of enormous influence in Germany and Austria, a passionate (liberal) nationalist, technologist, and amateur psychologist, and a firm disciple of Camillo Sitte. He outlined the principles guiding the design of his schools, almost as if in direct response to Simmel, arguing that, “Every school building should not have an alienating effect, but instead should be attractive in a *heimatlich* way ... A school building will be all the less alienating the less it deviates from the usual type of the place. ... Through its matter-of-fact beauty, it will build up the pride of the citizens.”<sup>19</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Grässer had read Simmel, and their similarities should be put down to sharing similar vocabulary,

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<sup>17</sup>Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life”, p. 175.

<sup>18</sup> Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” p. 183.

<sup>19</sup> Hans Grässer, “Ästhetik des Schulhauses,” June 1915. SAM-NLG-367.

metaphors and discourses rather than mutual admiration. Grässel had, however, read Sitte – many times; references to Sitte litter his work. Importantly for Grässel, this process of reconciliation would continue *inside* the school, as interior and exterior spaces were deliberately conceived of as part of one planned urban continuum by the architects and planners of the Munich Building Office.



**Figure 1:** Entrance hall of Implerstrasse school, by Hans Grässel, c. 1910-11. Author's photograph.

Thus, in the interior of the Implerstraße School built by Grässel in 1910-11, serving the poor, industrial Sendlinger Unterfeld quarter dominated by the railway goods terminus, power station and municipal abattoir, particular attention was paid to the interior spaces. They were designed to be

light, airy, “cultured” , and didactic. As with all municipal buildings in Munich, specific instructions were issued to prevent them being cold, institutional, formulaic, and bland. Decorative wall murals filled the circulation spaces, and were organised thematically, such as “Respect the Ruling House” , “Go Rambling!” and “Cultivate a Sense of *Heimat*” – and, rather more plausibly, “Santa Claus is Coming!” The rational, scientific, bureaucratic, “improving” process of compulsory schooling was thereby framed by spaces which emphasised *Heimat*, and children were taken out of classrooms and taught using the very structure and surfaces of the school as material for study – a common feature in all 33 of Munich’s schools built at that time. Text books were rare at this time and never in colour, so these teaching aids were important. The boys’ entrance to the school can be seen in figure 1 (left), showing “Protect the Birds!” and “Protect the Plants!” . How much influence this really had on young minds – given some of the paintings were so high up the wall – is debatable. However, the model was widely reported in the German press, and imitated by other cities. Referring to a similar strategy in the Corporation’s new orphanage, also by Grässer, a contemporary observer wrote, “In the rooms, halls and corridors the builder constantly set himself the task of avoiding all cold, barrack-like sobriety; all spaces should be a beloved *Heimat* to their occupants, and remain as such for them in happy memory for the whole of their lives.”<sup>20</sup> For all that such responses might seem naïve or dreamy looking back, creating environments of order, calm, cleanliness, warmth and good health were regarded by contemporaries as significant achievements in cities characterised by overcrowding, disease, dirt, noise, stink, and poverty. What remains rather lost to the historian, of course, is whether such efforts to restructure children’s consciousness worked.

Simmel’s critique of the relationship between the life of the city and the interior life of the individual was that the “personality can, so to speak, scarcely maintain itself in the face of [such

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<sup>20</sup> Lothar Meilinger, *Das Münchener Waisenhaus: Eine Studie* (Munich, n.d. [c.1910]), 34. SAM-Hochbauamt [HBA]-727.

building and the impersonal state].”<sup>21</sup> The efforts of Mayor Borscht, Grässel and the Corporation do seem to offer a sincere and committed attempt to eradicate the perceived vacuity and depersonalisation of the experience of urban space. However, they tried to do so without abandoning either the urban principle (they rejected, for example, resettling people out of the city as British garden city planners advocated), or the duty of the state to intervene rationally to produce citizens who were successfully modern and truly “at home” in the metropolis. Contemporary observers affirmed that the city government succeeded in preserving – or perhaps, creating – precisely the personality which Simmel and Sitte argued was endangered by the spaces of the modern metropolis. We should perhaps share the conclusion reached by a Berlin civil servant sent by the Prussian government to see what could be learnt from Munich’s energetic commitment to Sitte’s planning principles, when he wrote, “This city seems to be like a weightlifter’s barbell, with the two weights of beer and art joined together through the joining bar of personality and *Gemütlichkeit*.”<sup>22</sup> We should note, too, that personality and *Gemütlichkeit* (meaning variously mood, spirit, warmth, cosiness) were produced not by idealising a world before or outside the modern metropolis, but by deploying highly modern methods, initiated by the bureaucrats of a large city using state power, modern planning, aesthetic theory, pedagogical reform and compulsory education.

### **Fission and Fusion: The Individual, the Mass and the Fractured City**

After the war, the frequency of the word *Heimat* seems to have declined in expert discourse in Germany, although it did not disappear entirely. Almost every city in Germany seems to have called one of its 1920s housing estates ‘Neue Heimat’. However, the ambition to produce contented citizens, at home in the city, happily and successfully modern, co-operative, social and rational, did not diminish. For example, in Munich’s commitment in the 1920s to the creation of a social state

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<sup>21</sup> G. Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” p. 183.

<sup>22</sup> “Durch Oberbayern und Schwaben. Studienfahrt der Vereinigung für Staatswissenschaftliche Fortbildung. 2) München,’ *Tägliche Rundschau* (Berlin), 20 June 1911. SAM-NLG-360.

through housing, school building, care for the elderly, electricity generation, washing facilities and hospitals, the same underlying anxieties about disintegration and psychic distress on the one hand, and yet reconciliation and successful city living on the other, remained. This is demonstrated in the recurrent emphasis on the fracturing and splintering in the repercussions of city life, and also the danger that the social(ist) alternatives might foster a loss of exactly the kind of individuality and personality which had been so highly praised in the city's spatial organisation before the war.

Planning new housing developments in the 1920s was an unmistakable political imperative. It also offered urban governments in both Austria and Germany the possibility of exercising a new level of control over the spaces which constituted the "urban continuum" from the level of the most private, domestic spaces of the home, through the block, to the housing estate, to the area, and finally to the city as whole. It was a level of formal state control, of regulation and spatial structuring of private life, which Sitte in the 1880s could never have imagined. It would have been inconceivable to him that the psycho-spatial analysis on which he based his theories could be transformed into such an elaborate regulatory construct on both the micro and the macro level. In effect, planners and governors after the war were left without established theoretical guidance on how to organise the new urban spaces they set out to create, and instead had to re-interpret some of the principles of turn-of-the-century planning. In Central Europe, this normally took two forms: either the satellite model borrowed from British garden city thinking, in which housing estates would be built on the peripheries of cities, or even outside them; or a re-interpretation of Sitte, who constantly emphasised the advantages of increasing population density within the extant city, so long as this population's experience of, and emotional-psychological attachment to, urban space was improved.

That housing construction was a political and social imperative in post-war Germany and Austria, few denied. Almost every major European city east of France experienced extreme political

violence in the years 1917-1923, and much of this violence, when it acquired a coherent political voice, focused on housing. In the spring of 1918, before an immediate end to the war was inevitable, Munich City Council's chief housing bureaucrat foresaw a "terrifying spectre" of post-war housing shortages which would imperil all social order.<sup>23</sup> Mayor Borscht issued instructions marked "Highly Confidential!" in October 1918 (again, before the war's end), based on, "...the escalation of this [housing] crisis to be expected because of the imminent demobilisation of our troops and the most terrifying dangers to the public peace which we can expect from this..."<sup>24</sup>

One might assume that similar plans and anxieties existed elsewhere in Germany and Austria. Before November 1918 Munich council ordered the construction of experimental low-cost housing, the opening of all municipal buildings to homeless people for winter, the temporary suspension of all planning restrictions on housing construction, and most importantly of all for the future shape of European cities, the first ever large housing estate built in rows of flats with no streets in between (Alte Heide; see figure 2) based on modern town planning and social housing principles in Europe:



**Figure 2:** Alte Heide housing estate, 1918-1921, by Theodor Fischer. No roads run up between the blocks.

<sup>23</sup> Wohnungsreferent Mayr, "Warum brauchen wir in München eine städtische Siedlungs-Gesellschaft?," "Im 4. Kriegsjahr." SAM-WA-18.

<sup>24</sup> Borscht an das Referat II, Betreff: Wohnungsfrage und Demobilmachung, 8 October 1918. SAM-WA-18.

roadless, built in rows, organised around social facilities. That this was done by a pre-revolutionary Centre Party municipal administration is striking.

The objectives of subsequent housing policy in Munich – and, indeed, most European cities – were not, however, solely to do with improving the standard of living for urbanites or averting revolution. The old preoccupations of experiential quality and emotional wellbeing remained. This can be seen by focusing on the two joint mayors of Munich from 1923 onwards, Karl Scharnagl of the moderate Roman Catholic Centre Party, and Hans Kufner, a politically independent career civil servant. In a meeting of the Housing Committee Scharnagl established a strategy for Munich which set out to overcome the major obstacles to the successful inhabitation of the metropolis he perceived in some contemporary housing solutions – particularly those of Vienna and Frankfurt. He said, “The execution of [housing] projects in Munich will distance themselves just as much from the clumping together in one mass [*Menschenzusammenballung*] of many hundreds of households in the smallest dwellings in one block, as is the practice in Vienna, as from the expansion at this time – a luxurious tendency – of low-rise housing estates.”<sup>25</sup> Scharnagl explicitly rejected Viennese models, such as Karl-Marx-Hof, and implicitly rejected the famous plans of Frankfurt City Council, to which he was referring when he spoke of the “luxurious tendency of low-rise housing”.

To reinforce the ideological message behind the major re-structuring of urban space which the City’s monumental housing programme proposed, a major exhibition was organised to promote it: the “Home and Technology Exhibition, 1928” – a hugely popular, nationally successful attempt to replicate the impact of the Ideal Home Exhibitions in London. As Karl Mantel, the city’s Chief of Police, wrote in 1928, home life and urban experience were part of the same whole, and needed to be recognised as such, almost pleading that, “In these days of hustle and bustle, agitated hurry and

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<sup>25</sup> Sitzung des Wohnungsausschusses, 14 March 1928. SAM-WA-64.

the constant pressure of dreadful demands and expectations which attack the health and the nerves of each individual, whoever wants to refresh his vigour and joy in creation must have one thing above all: Refreshment in a comfortable home.” [Emphasis in original]<sup>26</sup> The space of the home was to be developed as an answer to the negative aspects of modern urban life – and such an answer would result in “refreshed vigour” and “joy in creation.”

These objectives were intended to reconcile the individual to scientifically organised planning of space (internal and external), while preserving individual autonomy and personality. When City of Birmingham councillors asked the Munich corporation what “typical” housing solutions they favoured for “the worker”, the council’s planning department told their study tour, “No real dwellings for workmen as such have been built, which would crowd people together into a narrow space, and furthermore, which would unite them in crowded dwelling blocks. [The design of our housing] is due to the diverse habits and desires of the population, which had to be considered. The experiences up to this time have shown that this principle is right, and answers the local wants.”<sup>27</sup> This particular vision of urban space, focusing on a fear of clumping people together into a de-individualised mass, was primarily a reaction to the development of large housing estates in Vienna, which the study trip from Birmingham had just visited. While superficially the corporation’s housing estates seemed to resemble Vienna’s, in fact they were organised around very different principles. In Vienna, they were planned in open forms, not around small spaces, and though they had similar population densities when viewed as a whole, the scale of the buildings on the Munich estates was worked out according to Sitte’s principles of the emotional need for enclosure to prevent agoraphobia. In particular, the large open spaces in, for example, Vienna’s Karl-Marx-Hof were avoided.

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<sup>26</sup>Karl Mantel in *Amtlicher Katalog: Ausstellung “München 1928: Heim und Technik,”* 45. SAM-A&M [Ausstellungen und Messen]-648.

<sup>27</sup> Referat VII [Wohnungsreferat], “Principles for judging the housing question” in response to Scharnagl, 29 July 1930, letter requesting the housing department to explain why the town had no working class housing as had Vienna. Original in English. SAM-B&R-993.

The second feature which differentiated the Vienna's estates from Munich's was the provision of, and charges for, shared social facilities such as heating and laundry. Such charges were felt by the Munich Corporation also to remove individual freedom from citizens, and this was a type of urban freedom which they particularly prized. Whereas the Viennese focused on providing communal laundries and other facilities in their estates, and especially communal central heating, Munich's experts rejected this solution. Unfortunately, the records of the fact-finding mission to Vienna are lost, but Frankfurt (having employed several of Vienna's planners and architects) copied both central heating and central laundries. When the councillors and officials from Munich went to Frankfurt, they found much disquiet amongst aggrieved housewives who lived in collectively organised housing estates. Given the way that experts typically constructed their knowledge, it is quite remarkable that the councillors and experts bothered to find out these women's opinion at all, given both their gender and class. The Frankfurt women complained that in hard times when money was tight, they used to economise by having no heating and putting the whole family to sleep in one bed or one room. Equally, they complained that the standard laundry charges were an irritation, as many families did not have enough clothes to make weekly laundry worthwhile. It also meant they had to walk through the snow to the wash house, and it took away a substantial source of income from "taking in", which enabled many women not to have to work outside the home.<sup>28</sup>

However, it was precisely practices such as keeping girls off school to help with washing, and different sexes and generations sleeping in the same room, that the experts behind the Vienna and Frankfurt projects wanted to eliminate through redesigning the spaces in which people lived. Planners across the West shared these goals, all believing that they could design out domestic labour, incest and tuberculosis. The projects in Munich were not nostalgic, backward-looking or

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<sup>28</sup> Bericht über die Reise der Mitglieder der Stadtratskommission beim Wohnungsamt nach Nürnberg und Frankfurt-am-M vom 22.-24. November 1926. SAM-WA-63.

lacking in planning: they did not reject modernity, although they did reject some of the more controlling ambitions of the modern state. Rather, the designs in Munich stressed an alternative aspect of modernity: personal freedom. It was precisely the liberties that urban life afforded the individual – liberties Simmel and countless others were so keen to emphasise throughout their work – which they wanted to enhance. “[T]oday, metropolitan man is ‘free’ in a spiritualised and refined sense,” argued Simmel, and most experts across Germany agreed.<sup>29</sup>

Of course, the Munich City Councillors did not approve of girls being kept away from school either, but it seems they felt deeply committed to that strand of urbanised modernity which emphasised personal freedom and individual liberty alongside rational planning, and they wanted to produce spaces which facilitated it. Therefore, while Munich’s solutions rejected the ambitious “totalising” plans of the social state evidenced by “Red” Vienna, they did not shy away from modernity and the city. They used the enhanced powers of the state to plan space to provide pockets of autonomy, however small, in the fabric of the city. Their commitment to expertise, to the social, to planning, to state activity matched Vienna’s, but their goals in terms of the personal life of the individual were very different. As one of the corporation’s municipal architects concluded on planning for women in the home, “[I]t is the joy of the housewife to create in the home, to organise her home herself, to make it homely and cosy.”<sup>30</sup>

Patronising as this observation may seem, Munich’s housing estates and domestic interiors offered far more scope for individual freedom than more meticulously planned environments. They explicitly ascribed agency to working-class women, rather than standardising “*the* working-class woman” as the object of helping interventions. Munich rejected solutions which emphasised the same-ness of people, refusing to design spaces for the “typical” person, whether “worker” or

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<sup>29</sup> Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” p. 181.

<sup>30</sup> Bauamtman Josef Jelinek, “Die Vernunft der Heim & Technik,” in *Amtlicher Katalog: Ausstellung “München 1928: Heim und Technik”*, p. 75.

“woman.” However, Munich may reasonably be considered more committed to the modern city than Vienna, as the Viennese authorities always regarded their inner-city housing estates based on apartment blocks as second best, a crisis solution before peripheral garden cities could be built in the green belt.<sup>31</sup> Munich’s authorities never liked garden cities, always insisting that urban problems required urban solutions.

These were precisely the spatial policies which the Munich Corporation considered most detrimental to the individual’s experience of the city, because they were based on a version of satellite garden city principles (May, Frankfurt’s director of planning, had spent a year working with Ebenezer Howard in Britain), or socialist principles. Crucially, the types of housing environments planned by Frankfurt’s city government were outside the extant city. They were also very low density, often terraced houses, and usually required the inhabitant to take out a mortgage – according to British principles. While the Munich Corporation thoroughly approved of the way the Viennese had used housing projects to stamp orientation points and an identity into the extant fabric of the city, they thoroughly disapproved of the tendencies in Frankfurt to turn away from the city. Whatever the problems of the modern world were, they had to be solved in that world, and not by attempts to recuperate an ultimately illusory realm of emotional calm and spiritual peace in the countryside.

When the Bavarian councillors went to see the developments near Frankfurt they noted that although they had “modern forms and colours, that was all that was modern about them.”<sup>32</sup> In particular, they noted that the low-rise, low-density, out-of-town solutions of the Frankfurt planning department offered no opportunity to influence the *Stadtbild* – the over-all impression of the town. The Munich Corporation was keen to address the very fabric of the city, as the Viennese had done,

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<sup>31</sup> Blau, *Architecture of Red Vienna*, p. 325.

<sup>32</sup> Bericht über die Reise der Mitglieder der Stadtratskommission beim Wohnungsamt nach Nürnberg und Frankfurt-am-M vom 22.-24. November 1926. SAM-WA-63.

but without their “levelling” and “clumping” aspects. Leading experts in the Munich Corporation emphasised in the mid-1920s that the city was becoming too visually diverse, and that activities like the school building programme were absent. This meant that the city was losing the visual and experiential homogeneity necessary to produce happy, proud, participative, and compliant citizens.<sup>33</sup> Mayor Kufner, chairman of the Building Commission, argued that:

Before the war, Munich was recognised as paradigmatic in the shaping of buildings and the city [*Bau- und Stadtgestaltung*]; whether it still could claim this leadership today is another question. A study commission of the council has seen many buildings worthy of note in its travels to London, Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Cologne, Düsseldorf, Essen, Mühlheim-a.-Ruhr etc. Unfortunately, Munich after the war sadly fell prey to a certain fragmentation [*eine gewisse Zersplitterung*]; we built in too many places, on too small a scale, and the overall impression which the city makes on its inhabitants has not profited from this; in the exteriors of our buildings, and in the city as a whole, too much diversity has left a lot to be desired.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, after the war experts in Munich pursued a policy of *Lückenbebauung*, “building in the gaps”, in order to control land speculation and increase urban density. The opportunities offered by large-scale housing projects seemed to offer the perfect occasion to remedy this, and re-impose a unified homogenous order on a fractured city. As Mayor Scharnagl argued, “in the current building programmes, the city-building idea has not been allowed its full scope.” He went on, “The estates should not be made up of individual buildings [as in Frankfurt], but appear as one, distinct block....[But the programme] should consciously oppose the Viennese block creations with a totally different concept of housing politics and space.”<sup>35</sup>

Mayor Scharnagl proposed that if the drive to end “*Zersplitterung*” in the metropolis were to be successful, “the whole process will be all the easier, the bigger the building programme is, the

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<sup>33</sup> Scharnagl an die Referate III [Finance] und VII [Housing], 23 April 1926; RR. Helmreich [Wohnungsreferent] an die sämtlichen Stadtratsfraktionen, 2 June 1926; Referat VII an die Stadtratsfraktion der Nationalsozialistischen Arbeiterpartei, 12 June 1926. SAM-WA-64.

<sup>34</sup> Karl Preis, *Die Beseitigung der Wohnungsnot: Denkschrift und Anträge des städt. Wohnungsreferenten vom 24. Dezember 1927* (Munich, 1927), pp. 79-80.

<sup>35</sup> Preis, *Die Beseitigung der Wohnungsnot*, p. 95.

bigger the estates are; that is obvious.”<sup>36</sup> As the estates were to be built in the city, there would be limits on how large they could be; so in between these big projects of generally 1,500-2,000 flats each, smaller schemes of between 70 and 300 or so flats would be placed, permeating the city from mediaeval core to industrial suburb. This programme, called the “12,000 Programme”, was brought to completion in three years from 1928 to 1931. What distinguished it from the existing, *ad hoc* Munich housing programme (which had also built about 12,000 dwellings between 1925-28) was its attempt to re-impose a visual and experiential order on the city, to create a coherent, homogenous and imposing set of spatial experiences. Average occupancy of a dwelling in Munich in 1930 was approximately 4 people,<sup>37</sup> a figure likely to underestimate the occupancy in these dwellings as priority was given to large or extended families. This implies that at least 48,000 people were living in housing built under this scheme to end the splintered city. Put differently, one in twelve of the population of the city as a whole lived in these projects intended at once both to liberate and regulate the individual urbanite, to bring wholeness and satisfaction and contentment to both the people who lived in them, and the city which surrounded them.

## Conclusion

Camillo Sitte and Munich’s aldermen, councillors, architects, draughtsmen and experts certainly saw themselves – and were seen by others – as being in the mainstream of Central European debate about what the city was, and what it was for, and how modernity might be defined and manipulated. But it is crucial that the link between the imaginary, discursive world of the architectural polemic can be embedded in this mainstream, and this means doing two things. First of all, it means focussing on the pathway from theory into practice. And secondly, it means focusing on *ordinary* practice. The typical school and the typical housing estate are generally overlooked in architectural histories, because of the focus on the exceptional or the good. While planning history has a cannon

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<sup>36</sup> Generalbebatte um die 12.000 Wohnungen, Sitzung des Wohnungsausschußes, 14 March 1928, *Münchener Gemeinde-Zeitung*, 24 March 1928.

<sup>37</sup> Bayerischer Architekten- und Ingenieurverband e.V. (ed.), *München und seine Bauten nach 1912* (Munich, 1984), p. 86.

of its own, it has been willing to focus on the typical, the banal and the ordinary. However, it has tended to view planning, as Carl Abbott complained, as a discrete area of historical investigation, unrelated to the broader concerns of 'mainstream' historical narrative production. In this article, I have tried to show how concerns about urban modernity and what we might today call 'social cohesion' impacted on a material environment, an environment which, in some sense, was (and is) real in a way that 'discourse' is not. While the built forms would be incomprehensible without understanding the discourses which produced them, and which informed their use, the frequent focus in cultural and planning history writing on discourse detached from the spaces it described can be profitably enlarged by a willingness to move beyond the 'imaginary', and reasserting the 'real.'