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2012

document version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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citation for published version (APA)

Geertse, M. A. (2012). *Defining the universal city. The International Federation for Housing and Town Planning and transnational planning dialogue 1913-1945*.

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Summary

Defining the universal city.

The International Federation for Housing and Town Planning and transnational planning dialogue 1913-1945.

Michel Geertse

The Town Planning Conference in Amsterdam in 1924 was very successful. Prominent planners and housing reformers descended upon the Dutch capital to discuss the latest trends in their profession. The adopted resolutions would have a profound influence on the planning practice in the Netherlands and abroad. Although the congress is well documented, we know relatively little about its proprietor, the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning (IFHTP). What kind of organization was it? Available literature approaches the IFHTP from three different levels. By far most publications behold the IFHTP from the level of (national) members. It mainly concerns monographs of planners and planning organizations that under the header of internationalization pay attention to international memberships, conference attendance and or paper presentations. Some authors study the IFHTP at the level of single organization. As a rule, they emphasize the congresses of the IFHTP, in particular on the evolution of planning concepts and participation by planning pioneers. Finally, there are authors that regard the IFHTP as a part a larger, international or transnational network society. They focus on structure and substance of international networks and the evolution of concepts for inter- and transnational collaboration. This research presupposes that the three mentioned levels are interrelated and effect and affect each other. It is impossible to grasp the essence of the IFHTP from just one level. However, publications that offer a combination of the three levels are rare.

Connecting the three levels on the basis of available literature is far from straightforward. Literature does not offer a complete, comprehensive survey of the history of the IFHTP. Not all episodes are covered and for other episodes literature offers conflicting interpretations. Moreover, the approaches used at different levels not necessarily match. Each level has its own perspective. At the level of the members and single organization, the history of international planning usually is conceptualized as a history of ideas. Researchers of inter- and transnational planning networks – by Saunier labeled as the Urban Internationale – focus on (the history of) conceptualizations of international cooperation. Although literature mostly treats the ideas and experiences that circulated in the IFHTP and the network structures underpinning the IFHTP separately, these are of course closely related. It does not make sense to study the evolution of the agenda of the IFHTP congresses exclusively as a history of ideas. This agenda was not just dictated by the latest housing and planning developments. To a large extent it was defined by the structure and substance of the IFHTP – objectives, organization, membership, internal power balances, culture of governance, et cetera – and those of the Urban Internationale – rivalry from and collaboration with other international organizations, cross-membership, et cetera. Some individuals, organizations and even countries were not allowed to participate or their participation was discouraged. Planning concepts that could not be reconciled with the mission of the IFHTP or could not count on the approval of a majority among the members were barred from the congress

agenda. Naturally, the IFHTP closely followed what its immediate competitors when drafting its agenda.

This research focuses on the IFHTP in the period 1913-1945. Firstly, it wants to reconstruct the history of this largely forgotten organization. Although the IFHTP has received some attention from political historians with an interest in transnationalism and municipalism, it has received little attention from planning historians and architectural historians. A thorough study is long overdue. Not only was the IFHTP effectively the first international organization explicitly dedicated to town planning, but it also was one of the foremost platforms for internationalization of the planning profession in the Interbellum. Secondly, this research wants to analyze how the IFHTP performed as a network organization and how this performance was effected and affected by its membership and the structure of the Urban Internationale. Thirdly, this study wants to use the IFHTP as a case study to enhance our understanding of the Urban Internationale. Saunier provided a rough sketch of the structure of this network society, but he rightly stated that we still know relatively little about its constituents, nor who actually participated. This research presupposes that these constituents did not act independently on the basis of their free choice (agency), but that their conduct was considerably defined by the structure and substance of interrelated social networks.

The research objectives are translated into three research questions:

- I. What kind of organisation was the IFHTP and what was its mission in its formative years and in the Interbellum?
- II. How did the IFHTP function as an international platform for housing and town planning and how did it influence the transnational definition of the universal city?
- III. How does the IFHTP relate to the Urban Internationale and transnational civil society; to what extent do they share a similar trajectory?

Chapter 2 discusses the early years of the IFHTP (1913-1920). It was established in 1913 on the initiative of the British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (GCTPA). An international association in name, in reality it was little more than an extension of the GCTPA. It was administered by GCTPA officials from GCTPA headquarters in London. The earliest members were mainly recruited among the foreign contacts of the GCTPA (foremost garden cities associations abroad), complemented with housing societies and planning organizations that supported the garden city idea. The foreign members looked to the British initiators to take the lead. The British leaders used this *carte blanche* to model the IFHTP after the GCTPA (a voluntary association with a hierarchical structure and harmonious governance). They wanted to gain control over the transnational dissemination of the garden city idea to exorcise erroneous interpretations and counter growing competition from organizations such as the *Union Internationale des Villes* (UIV) and the International Housing Congresses (IHC). The international garden city congresses that the GCTPA had been organizing since 1904 were found inadequate to achieve these aims, so the GCTPA established the IFHTP to provide more internationalist stature to its garden city campaign. Naturally, the First International Garden City Congress (1914) of the IFHTP in London was dominated by British planning experiments on garden city lines – garden cities, garden suburbs and garden villages. The informality of the event and lack of a clearly defined programme clearly reveals that the IFHTP was still in a stage of infancy. Confronted with

deviating foreign garden city experience, the British hosts emphasized cooperative organization as the dominant characteristic of proper (British) garden city experience.

World War I put the world of the IFHTP upside down. Foreign participation dropped, putting the fresh organization financially in a tight position. The largest foreign factions no longer participated. The German garden city workers were barred from membership. Contact with the Russian garden city movement became impossible and after the Bolshevik take-over a renewal of the contact was shunned. The American Christian socialist avoided belligerent Europe and also did not return after the war. To stay in business the IFHTP launched its Belgium reconstruction campaign, after the war geographically expanded to include northern France. The IFHTP looked beyond its own backing and explicitly addressed an external party: the Belgian government. The influence of the Belgian and French members rapidly increased during the reconstruction campaign. Although they by no means were hostile towards the garden city idea, their conception of modern planning encompassed more than (British) garden city expertise. The British leaders of the IFHTP failed to account for these Belgian and French sentiments. In their eagerness to transform Belgium into a model garden city nation, their tone hardened. Now they attacked continental garden suburb experience. Belgium was to embrace the true, independent garden city and should not settle for watered-down compromises. The reconstruction campaign brought the outlines of a necessary modern town planning science into sight, but the insistence on the garden city idea prevented the exploration of such a scientific discipline.

Although the IFHTP suffered from restrictions imposed by the war, it was better off than its foremost competitors and transnational civil society at large, that were forced to close their doors (IHC) or adopt a far humbler profile (UIV). Thus it was able to strengthen its position unchallenged during the war, building up a comfortable advance on its rivals, although it was clear that it urgently needed to renew its mission if it wanted to keep continental members involved.

Chapter 3 explores the transformation of the IFHTP into international study platform in the first half of the 1920s (1920-1926). After the war the IFHTP fully resumed its activities. Its first reflex was to adhere to its pre-war war structure, despite the continental reservations put forward during the reconstruction campaign. However, the British hegemony was soon challenged. The Belgian and French members considered exclusive garden city propaganda under British guidance a too narrow foundation for internationalization. They were supported by a tremendous influx of new members (between 1920 and 1926 congress attendance increased sevenfold). The new members mainly stemmed from the faltering UIV and IHC and a growing volume of professional institutions and organizations, reflecting the rapid institutionalization of housing and planning in the Western countries after World War I. This changed the composition of membership. Interested laymen stepped back and professionals, administrators and civil servants gained the upper hand. They forced the British leaders to reconsider the framework of the IFHTP. The IFHTP gained independence from the GCTPA and the foreign members gradually got more power. Halfway through the 1920s the British faction had lost its absolute power. Nevertheless, the IFHTP did retain a distinct British 'flavor'. The British culture of voluntary action, hierarchy, harmony and unanimity did persevere.

The shift in the power balance and increase of scale also affected the mission of the IFHTP and the organization of its activities. Confronted with opposition against the true, independent garden city, the British leaders adapted the mission of the IFHTP to the propagation of satellite towns, garden suburbs with all the attributes of the true garden city. However, most members considered the satellite town an inadequate solution to remedy all the problems of advancing urbanization. Thus the IFHTP merged the satellite concept into a broader, internationally comparative planning concept: regional decentralisation. The activities to disseminate the mission required professionalization and systematization. The annual international congresses of the IFHTP matured from modest gatherings of garden city enthusiasts into large-scale *CityEvents* that served as focal points in the international networks for the transnational trade of housing and planning theory and practice. From 1923 onwards, the IFHTP also started issuing its own periodical to circulate planning knowledge on the basis of standardized questionnaires that facilitated international comparison. The exploration of an international, comparative planning discipline was further dressed by a range of committees, working on proposals for a universal planning annotation code, a travelling planning exhibition and a tri-lingual planning glossary.

The post-war growth and professionalization of the IFHTP mirrors the expansion of transnational civil society in the 1920s. However, the trajectory of the IFHTP deviates from those of the UIV and the IHC. The competitive advantage of the IFHTP can partly be explained by its superior starting position immediately after the war. It could build on wartime experience, whereas its rivals more or less had to reestablish themselves. But differences in structure and culture also played a vital role. The IHC was torn apart by fierce internal debates and eventually was an easy prey for the IFHTP to swallow in 1926. Within the IFHTP, the British harmonious culture held such internal conflicts at bay. The UIV was seriously handicapped by its institutional character. It primarily served local authorities, although after World War I the nation state was generally accepted as the basis level for international collaboration. The UIV only managed to successfully reposition itself after it had discarded its old ideal of global governance by cooperating local authorities that was to replace warmongering nation-states.

Chapter 4 elaborates upon the performance of the IFHTP as international study platform in the period 1926-1937. To accommodate the explosive growth of membership the IFHTP decided to divide its working sphere into sections in 1925. Especially the proposed housing section was well-received. Housing reformers among the membership of the IFHTP saw an excellent opportunity to transfer the activities of the faltering IHC to this new section. The IHC agreed to merge into the IFHTP, provided that an independent housing section was established as soon as possible. The two amalgamated at the 1926 Vienna congress of the IFHTP. The IFHTP executives and the former IHC executives almost immediately clashed vehemently over the framework for transnational housing dialogue. The IFHTP executives proposed a housing secretariat on the continent independent from the hosting country, whereas former IHC dignitaries demanded a housing secretariat on the continent independent from the central secretariat in London. Although the process of 'democratization' in the IFHTP continued, the dissatisfied housing reformers nevertheless felt that the British members retained a disproportionate influence. Thematically, the controversy was about the relation between housing and planning and the foundation of housing. The former IHC executives wanted to treat housing as an independent, specialized

discipline, whereas the IFHTP so far had treated housing as a part of a wider (regional) planning profession. Also, the former IHC leaders wanted to exclusively promote public (state-sponsored) housing, whereas the executives of the IFHTP were unwilling to relinquish voluntary action entirely. The housing controversy also was a direct confrontation between British IFHTP governance (voluntary action, harmony and unanimity) and a more business-like, continental culture of decision-making (paid staff, majority voting). The discontent housing reformers left the IFHTP to establish their own Frankfurt-based International Housing Association, usually referred to as the *Verband*, in 1929.

The establishment of the *Verband* did not restore the internal peace in the IFHTP. IFHTP membership was divided into supporters and opponents of the *Verband* and neutrals, refusing to choose sides. The internal atmosphere was tense. The dissatisfied housers disagreed who had the 'oldest rights' to promote housing: the IFHTP or the *Verband*? The *Verband* wanted to come to an arrangement with the IFHTP. It refused to join the IFHTP and instead urged a demarcation of the working sphere, which was unacceptable to the IFHTP. They did agree to seek practicable collaboration, starting with the planned 1931 congresses of both organizations in Berlin. These congresses failed to distinguish one from another, making the existence of two separate bodies covering the same territory unaccountable to the members. Thus the two organisations started negotiating about far-reaching collaboration, possibly even re-amalgamation. Reunion was now negotiable because the *Verband* was in a tight spot. Its secretary had deceased and after the Nazi take-over in 1933 its future in Germany looked bleak. Eventually the Nazis took control over the *Verband* and only agreed to a reunion if it would provide sounder footing for them in the IFHTP. The negotiations were greatly hampered by lingering distrust and personal feuds. The IFHTP considered the *Verband* as an exclusive vehicle for socialist and Nazi views on housing and planning. The *Verband* was annoyed by the slow decision-making within the IFHTP. Eventually in 1937 an agreement was reached and the two reunited. This agreement was only made possible by silencing outspoken opponents. The terms for a reunion were a heavily contested compromise that especially benefitted the Nazis. The central office was to be relocated on the continent and Nazi Germany was offered the presidency of the IFHTP.

The housing controversy heavily affected the transnational dialogue of the IFHTP. Immediately after its Vienna congress the membership of the IFHTP continued to grow. The new members mainly stemmed from the former IHC and the continued advancing institutionalisation of housing and planning at local and national levels. However, around 1930 the continued growth stagnated, congress attendance stabilized at about 1,000 registered delegates. Some members left the IFHTP to join the *Verband*, others followed once internal tensions increased. The decreasing number of congresses did membership recruitment no good. The IFHTP decided to concentrate on the negotiations with the *Verband* at the expense of its congress activity. Very likely the Great Depression – for some members participation became too expensive – and the rise of new totalitarian regimes – some members were replaced or chaperoned by new members more favourable to the new regimes – had a significant influence on the membership of the IFHTP in the 1930s. Of course the mission of the IFHTP affected membership as well. The GCTPA lost interest in the IFHTP once the garden city idea faded into the background. Its position was taken over by the Town Planning Institute (1914).

The congress agenda was affected by the housing controversy as well. This agenda witnessed a rigid, and at times artificial, separation between housing and planning issues. The housing sessions circled around two closely interrelated subjects: high-rise developments and slum clearance. So far the IFHTP had exclusively propagated one family houses, but it no longer could deny the advance of high-rise tenement compounds, both in suburbia and urban renewal schemes in the inner city. It could not ignore reality and had to come to terms with high-rise development in urban areas. The IFHTP continued to favour low-rise development, reflecting the general consensus among housing professionals in the Interbellum. The planning sessions initially continued to follow the path of regional decentralisation, although this path soon was found wanting. Despite the success of decentralisation, the overcrowded cities did not dissolve. So the IFHTP had to address the existing cities. First it turned its attention to the preservation of the historic city centres, as urban redevelopments and the growing volume of traffic threatened urban heritage. From there it reconsidered its conception of city extensions within a regional frame. Regional decentralisation matured into regional recentralisation as advocates of satellite planning sought a new frame to reconcile and control inner city dynamics and a flight to suburbia.

The trajectory of the IFHTP in the period 1926-1937 resembles those of the Urban Internationale and transnational civil society. The continued growth in the second half of the 1920s is consistent with the expansion of these two larger entities. Although the IFHTP had swallowed the IHC, it experienced increased competition. The UIV was firmly on its feet again and had become the main rival of the IFHTP. New players, like the CIAM, the *Association Internationale des Cités Linéaires (AICL)* and the *Verband* entered the transnational urban scene. These newcomers (the *Verband* excluded) were marginal players that did not really pose a threat to the IFHTP, although they did retain a 'freshness' that challenged mainstream planning concepts as disseminated by the IFHTP. In the 1930s the expansion of the IFHTP stagnated. At first sight, this stagnation mirrors the decline of transnational civil society under the influence of the Great Depression and international political tensions that would culminate in the Second World War. However, the IFHTP was not that heavily affected by these external factors. Its inactivity – and that of the *Verband* – mainly originated in the housing controversy and the seemingly endless negotiations between the IFHTP and the *Verband*. The UIV, that other mainstream constituent of the Urban Internationale, experienced relatively little obstruction in organising its activities in the first half of the 1930s.

Chapter 5 treats a dark page in the IFHTP history: the annexation by the Nazis (1935-1945). The Nazis used the reunion of the *Verband* and the IFHTP as leverage to gain sounder footing in the latter. They wanted to use the IFHTP as a vehicle to promote the Nazi ideology of *Neues Europa*, one united Europe under German leadership. Of course they met resistance. The (British) leaders of the IFHTP and their supporters frenetically tried to hold on to the old ways. Moreover, American representatives of the '1313 groups, financially backed by the vast reserves of the Spellman Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation, tried to coerce the European-based constituents of the Urban Internationale towards an American-inspired new world order based on cooperation and efficiency. The first power struggle about the new location of the central IFHTP secretariat was won by the Americans. In 1938 the IFHTP moved into the Shell Building in Brussels that now housed the joint secretariat of the IFHTP, the UIV and the International Institute of Administrative Sciences (IIAS). The

Germans were unable to seize more power. Anti-German sentiments rapidly grew among the IFHTP backing because of the German persecution of Jews and leftwing activists and its invasion of neighboring countries. Still, Karl Strölin, the new Nazi president of the IFHTP and head mayor of Stuttgart, managed to get all publishing activity of the IFHTP relocated to Stuttgart in 1938. This activity was professionalized and intensified to illustrate the efficiency of German leadership.

Only after the outbreak of the Second World War the Nazis were able to seize total control over the IFHTP. The Brussels secretariat was carted off to Stuttgart and subsequently fully integrated into the municipal apparatus. The representative structure of the IFHTP was bypassed and Strölin drew all power towards him. The role of membership was marginalized. Membership inevitably was confined to Nazi Germany, its allies, the occupied territories and some neutral countries that still could be reached. It became impossible to organize international congresses. Thus the periodical of the IFHTP became its main medium for transnational dialogue. Strölin and his subordinates toured occupied Europe and the countries belonging to the Axis-alliance to maintain direct contact and possibly recruit new members. This strategy was unsuccessful. The occupied countries were reluctant to participate, especially when it became evident Germany would eventually lose the war.

The Nazis were unable to leave their mark on the final congresses of the IFHTP before the Second World War. Although they were fervent supporters of *Raumplanung*, the German equivalent of an all-encompassing comprehensive planning, the strict separation between housing and planning issues persevered. In the final years of peace the housing dialogue introduced new themes: housing in tropical climates and housing of special groups. In wartime the scope soon narrowed, as Nazi ideology and (military) censorship dictated the dialogue. Strölin only introduced one new highly topical housing theme: emergency housing. The main subject of the planning dialogue at last two congresses was national planning, a field in which the Germans excelled. During the War Strölin readily drew on the acknowledgment of German national planning. He presented *Raumplanung* as the ultimate tool to achieve the new order of *Neues Europa*. He thought that the IFHTP as an international organisation could be a valuable partner in the shaping of this new world order. However, the members of the IFHTP did not want to become part of this new order.

The path of the IFHTP in the period 1935-1945 deviates from the paths of transnational civil society and the radical, leftwing exponents of the Urban Internationale. Most transnational organizations were forced to close their doors during the armed conflict. However, the trajectory of the IFHTP was not unique. Other mainstream platforms in the Urban Internationale that had remained politically neutral - for example the UIV and the IIAS - shared similar fates. They were gradually annexed by the Nazis or their allies to become a vehicle for Nazi propaganda.

The conclusion reflects on (the outcomes of) the research questions, the methodology, the scientific relevance of this research and possible future research. This research studied the Urban Internationale in a restricted sense - basically only the transnational circulation of housing and town planning knowledge in the period 1913-1945 - but in our steadily urbanizing world every conceivable issue could be labeled 'urban.' As such, the universal city is being defined continuously all around us.

