



The Exhibitionaryons in Connecting Town Planning Ideas to Everyday Existence

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The title for this paper is taken from a sentence in a report written by Frederick Gibberd discussing how town planning should be exhibited in the 1951 Festival of Britain (Gibberd, 1947-49). In his report Gibberd, one of the UK's foremost modernist architects at the time, discusses how to engage audiences when exhibiting architectural and town planning models so that the audience avoids seeing them as mere 'blueprints' and gains a sense of the space around them. In this paper our aim is to examine the historical role that planning exhibitions have had communicating ideas. Major exhibitions can variously be seen as sites of national promotion, marketing, public participation and entertainment (Forgan, 1998). While the catalytic role of such events in urban change is acknowledged (Monclus, 2009) the staging, evolution and meanings attached to purpose-built planning exhibitions have made little more than cameo appearances in planning histories, despite the importance attached to displays by pioneers like Geddes (Meller, 1995). Such events through to the present day provide a useful aesthetic and historical lens through which to view planning history from the perspective of both planners and the wider community. Here, we frame the role of exhibitions in different time periods throughout the 20th century as a medium for comprehending the nature and marketing of planning ideas. We make special reference to the Australian experience at two critical junctures in the development of planning thought: the late 1910s and late 1940s. Exhibitions in the 1910s were often attached to conferences and helped codify the aims, icons and progress of the planning movement as a largely spatial discipline. The 1940s were arguably the golden era for planning exhibitions (both one-offs and touring) used to communicate and crystallize a universal canon of modernist planning ideals and values as a part of the post-war reconstruction effort. The transmission and popularization of planning ideas through exhibitions continues with more sophisticated technologies challenging older style static displays and as part of an evolving construction of the notion of 'public information'. We conclude with reflections on a research agenda for the historiographical role of the planning exhibition and the shifting meanings of planning that they convey.

KEY WORDS: Exhibitions, marketing, transmission of planning ideas, public participation.