
James R. Palmitessa
design. No less interesting, however, is Colton's appraisal of
Khrushchev's hands-on form of urbanization that brought about
a number of flaschos, but also resulted in the artistic marvels to
be found in Moscow's subway stations. All this and more is aug-
mented by a generous number of tables, maps, illustrations and
appendices. Among the last of these is one in which Colton first
explains how Soviet statisticians defined living space require­
ments, then tabulates the total amount of housing constructed
by year from the early 1920s to the early 1990s.

In the midst of this plethora of information, one might pause to
wonder why the city's experience of the Second-World-War
years has been so neglected. Also, the all-encompassing na-
ture, not to mention the length, of this "city biography" might be
a bit daunting to some readers, and perhaps Colton has over-
done it when it comes to what some might consider extraneous
details. When all is said and done, however, there can be no
doubt that both the time and the effort required to absorb the ma-
terial offered by this author would be well invested by any
scholar. Furthermore, the book is an essential addition to the li-
brary of any sovietologist, regardless of his or her discipline.
And finally, it is most fitting that this in-depth biography of the
"socialist metropolis" should have been published in the year of
the Russian capital's 850th birthday. Despite its concentration
on only seventy-five of those years, Colton's tome stands as a
monument to that great city.

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Eliassen, Finn-Einar, and Geir Atle Ersland, eds. Profit and Urban
Land: Landownership in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Euro-
xiv, 277. Maps, tables, charts, black and white illustrations, bibliog-
raphies and index. ($84.95 cloth).

This volume presents papers from a conference on urban land-
ownership in medieval and early modern Northern and Eastern
Europe which took place in Bergen, Norway in October 1994. In
their introduction to this volume, the editors, Finn-Einar Eliassen
and Geir Atle Ersland, note that "among the 'thousand flowers'
of modern urban history research, some topics may still be re-
garded as more fundamental than others, and at least from a
topographical point of view, few themes can be more fundamen-
tal than those relating to urban land — the sites on which the
towns were built." (p.10) According to the editors, in the last few
decades new interest has developed in patterns of land-
ownership in Northern and Eastern Europe during the medieval
and early-modern periods, so they have brought together twelve
active researchers in the field — economic, social and legal his-
torians, archaeologists, historical geographers, and urban plan-
ers — from eight different countries of the region, who have
approached the subject from a variety of different angles.

A.J. Scrase (United Kingdom) reviews the continuing debate
over what defines a town. Warning against relying on one or a
number of limiting defining features, legal, demographic or other-
wise, Scrase makes a plea for using multiple, related criteria —
what he calls polythetic rather than monothetic sets of charac-
teristics — and goes on to discuss the potential and problems of
the different types of sources that are available for the historical
reconstruction of British towns. In an essay on the early develop-
ment of Ghent, Lübeck, and Novgorod, Rolf Hammel-Kiesow
(Germany) calls for the need to address multiple issues not only
in defining towns but in studying them as well. Using a variety of
sources, including monastic chronicles, archaeological evi-
dence, and plans, T.R. Slater (United Kingdom) compares
towns founded by the Benedictine order in England with those
established by other religious orders and secular authorities.

Economics takes center stage in a number of the papers. Derek
Keene (United Kingdom) notes that the urban property market is
often claimed as an invention of the modern age, but all avail-
able evidence for medieval England points to the early origin
and continuity of key features of property holding: monetization
of value, the capacity to reckon it as capital or income, and a
high degree of spatial differentiation in value determined by de-
mand and the frequency of exchange. Richard Rodger (United
Kingdom) shows that the "feuing" system, a distinctive Scottish
form of land tenure, provided property owners an annual income
in perpetuity and other fees, which they could use to borrow
capital to finance building and other developments. Geir Atle
Ersland (Norway) discusses a form of land rent that was charac-
teristic of many medieval and early-modern European cities, but
which existed in a "pure" form in medieval Bergen: namely, that
only in a small percentage of cases did house owners own the
land on which their houses stood (in Bergen that figure was less
than 3%). Taking off from an earlier thesis stating that the social
assignment of space in pre-modern European cities dominated
within a general economic context, Katalin G. Szende (Hungary)
shows that in the case of Western Hungary, economic factors
were as important as social ones.

The relationship between politics, landownership, and urban ex-
pansion is another key theme represented in the papers. Maria
Bogucka (Poland) discusses new town formation in Poland,
1500–1650. Bogucka notes that while the role of towns in the po-
litical life of Poland was drastically circumscribed during this pe-
riod due to the overwhelming dominance of the nobility, the
period witnessed a growth both in the number of new towns as
well as an expansion of some older ones. She argues for the
need to understand this urbanization process within an urban-ru-
cial context, pointing to the fact that town dwellers were buying
up rural land at time when the nobility and the clergy were in-
volved in a massive purchase of town properties. Robert Sand-
berg (Sweden) and Finn-Einar Eliassen (Norway) discuss, in
two separate papers, urban expansion and landownership in
early modern Sweden and Norway. In both countries, in the mid-
dle ages, the population was mostly made up of freeholder peas-
ants and the urban network was much smaller than in other
The Regional Plan Association of America (RPAA) looms large in American planning history not because of what the organization did collectively (not much), but rather because of what the members contributed as individuals (a great deal). The organizational designation suggests a substantial body with regular publications, local chapters, annual meetings, etc. In fact nothing could be further from the truth. The RPAA was an informal and loose knit group of acquaintances in overlapping friendship circles who would get together periodically to advocate for various of the ideas they held in common.

But as individuals, the RPAA consisted of many of the finest minds in American planning, architecture and social activism in the early decades of this century. Benton Macfay was instrumental in the creation of the Appalcan Trail. Henry Wright, Clarence Stein and Alexander Bing breathed life into the evolving American version of the English garden city through their creation of Sunnyside Gardens in Queens, New York and Radburn in Fairlawn, New Jersey. Edith Elmer Wood was an important figure in the creation of public housing. Perhaps the most prominent contribution of all came via the towering figure of Lewis Mumford, who through the power of his intellect and his writing talent continues to instruct generations of planning students and urbanists about important issues in city building. Among the other RPAA leading lights were Catherine Bauer, Stuart Chase, Robert Kohn, and Charles Whitaker; all significant names in American planning history.

Edward Spann’s book about these remarkable people and their times is a thoroughly researched history of this extraordinary organization. It provides far more detail about the intersections between their collective deliberations and individual works than has heretofore been known. It is an important contribution to American planning history because it permits us to more fully understand the personal and political dynamics behind some of the important innovations and writings with which RPAA members were connected both collectively and individually.

The RPAA’s “brief shining moment” was the two decades from the end of World War I to the end of the 1930s. From the vantage point of planning history these years are important as the moment in which the dimensions of the American landscape were transformed to accommodate the voracious spatial appetite of the automobile.

Ideologically these planners, architects, and social activists were critical of the unregulated market. They tended to view the problems of America as driven by over speculation. Their solution was tight control of regional land use. The auto-driven sprawl which plagues us now was then in its infancy. Few could perceive the social, economic, and environmental disaster awaiting future generations. It is a tribute to their collective intelligence and prescience that they could. Their solution was to use public planning mechanisms to reign in speculation and order regional growth. As our generation of planners attempts to help society dig out from under this costly sprawl with ideas about “new urbanism,” “transit oriented development,” and “pedestrian pockets,” we can only wonder at what might have been if the RPAA’s call had been heeded in its time.

The RPAA vision was built around a notion of the region as a natural entity. Because it was natural, it and not the market was the proper spatial focus for land use, urban design and civic con-