Cross-Border Country Planning Dialogue in Interwar Europe

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Abstract
The past years witnessed many publications on the roles of transnational expert networks in defining new professional fields and lobbying for social reform in the first half of the 20th century. The modern spatial planning profession, still in a stage of formation then, featured prominently in this transnational infrastructure. Pierre Yves Saunier has dubbed this international sphere the “Urban Internationale.” The participating planners devoted themselves to town and country planning. Rural historians so far have not discovered the potential of the transnational planning societies in the Urban Internationale as a source to study transnational country planning dialogue. Urban historians who have discovered these societies usually focus on urban planning models and neglect the planning of the countryside. This article uses the international congresses of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning (IFHTP) to analyze transnational country planning dialogue in interwar Europe. This London-based association sustained one of the largest transnational platforms for transnational planning dialogue between the wars.

Keywords
history, humanities, comparative history, modern period, political history, politics and humanities, political science, social sciences

Introduction
Throughout the 20th century, planners exchanged ideas and experiences. This trade was facilitated by a networked transnational planning society, embedded in international associations, institutions, publications, and events. This society performed as a community of practice build around a common interest in spatial planning; through the process of sharing information and experiences with the group, the members learned from each other and had an opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Transnational planning expertise can be perceived as an emergent property of this community and is thus socially constructed.

The identification of this transnational planning society has prompted different interpretations. Albers (1997) and Riboldazzi (2010) focus on urban design culture and assess this society as a stage for urban designers to discuss the turbulent developments of their expanding town planning profession. However, Saunier (2001) and Ewen (2008) focus on public administration and refer to a conflict-ridden international professional dialogue. Whyte (2012) has used the famous international town planning conference of the Royal Institute of British Architects in 1910 to demonstrate how international conferences served as “pretext(s) for domestic political lobbying” (p. 157). Research by Kohlrausch, Steffen, and Wiederkehr (2010) and Schot and Lagendijk (2008) points out that transnational expert networks between the wars navigated between universal professional standards and the political and cultural requirements of nation-states. The participating technocrats wanted to formalize transnational exchange to create a sheltered transnational arena where they could discuss technical challenges without their political connotations.

Saunier (2001) has placed this transnational planning society in the “Urban Internationale,” an international sphere to discuss definitions of and actions on the city. Although the adjective urban suggests that the transnationally organized planners only devoted themselves to spatial coordination of the city in its many guises, they actually also concerned themselves with the surrounding countryside. The British town and country planning and its French (urbanisme et aménagement du territoire) and German (Städtebau und Landesplanung, later replaced by Raumplanung as introduced by Gustav Langen in 1928) equivalents regarded town
and country as a continuum. As such, spatial planning of the countryside was an integral part of the discourse in the Urban Internationale (Geertse, 2012). Urban historians with an interest in urban planning have long discovered the transnational planning associations in the Urban Internationale. However, rural historians with an interest in rural planning so far have largely ignored these platforms. Perhaps they have been more concerned with the modernization of agriculture than the developments in spatial planning, but especially with regard to the settlement policies that were part of ruralization and internal colonization programs across Europe: between the wars, the spatial planning discourse in the Urban Internationale might provide valuable leads. For example, international planners met at London in 1935 to discuss the planning of the countryside under the auspices of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning (IFHTP, 1935).

This article uses the international congresses of the aforementioned IFHTP to analyze transnational country planning dialogue in interwar Europe.¹ This London-based association sustained one of the largest transnational platforms for planning dialogue between the wars. Which planners engaged in transnational planning dialogue and what was their conception of “the rural” and country planning? How did they define the relation between town and country (planning)? This article starts with a brief history of the IFHTP in the period 1913-1940 to provide a rough sketch of the context of the planning dialogue in this international organization.

IFHTP

The recent academic interest in transnational expert networks has sparked substantial interest in the IFHTP. In the past, planning history literature used to (exclusively) focus on the more familiar Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne (CIAM), a modest international gathering of modernist architects, although authors such as Van der Woud (1983) and Albers (1997) had already pointed out that the CIAM was only a marginal player in the transnational dissemination of planning ideas between the wars. Recent studies by Somer (2007) and Domhardt (2012) reveal that the CIAM agenda was in fact informed by that of the IFHTP. Riboldazzi (2010) labels the body of knowledge of the IFHTP as un’altra modernità, an alternative conception of modern housing and planning that was very influential in the Interbellum period and that so far has been unjustly overshadowed by the conception of modernity by CIAM.

Although the IFHTP represented one of the largest international rostrums for planners between the wars, its global coverage was rather limited. It started out as a cross-border extension of the British garden city movement before World War I, aided by befriended garden city workers on the European Continent. During the war, German and Austrian membership was temporarily barred—to be reinstated in late 1922—and after the October Revolution, Russian participation ceased. In the 1920s, the IFHTP matured into a transatlantic platform with active participation from most European countries, Northern America (the United States and Canada), and Australasia (Australia and New Zealand). In 1937, the Nazis gained sound footing in the international organization. It ended as a Nazi instrument during the Second World War (Geertse, 2012).

The British Garden Cities and Town Planning Association (GCTPA) established the IFHTP in 1913 to rally garden city workers from all parts of the world, to control the international dissemination of the garden city idea, and to counter competition from international organizations such as the Union Internationale des Villes (UIV) and the Congrès Internationaux des Habitations à Bon Marché (CIHBM). The foreign IFHTP members looked to the British initiator to take the lead. Thus, GCTPA officers administered the IFHTP from GCTPA headquarters in London. These British officers modeled the IFHTP after the GCTPA, introducing a strict hierarchical structure, an unpaid staff (honorary officers), and a culture of consensus seeking (unanimity). The IFHTP agenda was informed by official GCTPA policies, which before the war amounted to town planning “on garden city lines.”

World War I turned the world of the IFHTP upside down. Many of its foreign members suspended their participation. Nevertheless, it stayed in business and even launched its Belgium Reconstruction Campaign in 1915, building a competitive advantage on the UIV and the CIHBM that had to close their doors temporarily. The IFHTP looked beyond its initial backing and addressed the planning experts who were to take the reconstruction task at hand. The tone of the British officers hardened. In their eagerness to transform Belgium into a model garden city nation, they insisted on the implementation of true independent garden cities (Culpin, 1915). However, Continental Europe preferred low density housing in settlements near existing centers. The continental planners ignored the British diktat (Uyttenhove, 1985).

After the War, the IFHTP resumed its congress routine. Supported by the rapid post-war institutionalization of housing and town planning in the Western World (Ward, 2002) and the absence of immediate competitors (Geertse, 2012), the IFHTP matured into one of the largest transnational planning platforms in the first half of the 1920s. The British members lost their upper hand in the Bureau. New continental members contested the naturalness of (exclusive) British leadership (Geertse, 2012; Geertse, 2015). Thus, the Bureau became a political arena. Pressured by the continental members, the IFHTP introduced changes. It left the office of the GCTPA, employed its own paid secretary, and nominated its first non-British officer (International Garden Cities and Town Planning Federation [IGCTPF], 1922). Despite these reforms, the IFHTP did retain a distinct British flavor (Saunier, 2001).

By the mid-1920s, the steady growth of membership called for reorganization. The IFHTP resolved to divide its membership into four thematic sections, dedicated to respectively housing, garden cities, regional planning, and town...
planning (International Federation for Town and Country Planning and Garden Cities [IFTCPG], 1925a, 1925b). The proposed housing section was enthusiastically received by continental housing reformers in the IFHTP. They cherished the opportunity to transfer the activities of the faltering CIHBM to this section. The CIHBM wanted to disband and endeavored to find a successor. The new housing section was the ideal candidate, provided that this section would retain some autonomy (Wibaut, 1925). Obviously, the continental “housers” still perceived the IFHTP as a British stronghold. The IFHTP accepted this condition, and subsequently, the CIHBM formally transferred its activities to the IFHTP (International Federation for Housing and Town Planning [IFHTP], 1926).

The IFHTP Bureau and the former executives of the CIHBM almost instantly clashed. The contestations centered around the position of the proposed secretariat of the housing section on the Continent. The Bureau envisioned a secretariat that was independent from the hosting country, whereas the former CIHBM dignitaries demanded a secretariat that was independent from central IFHTP headquarters. This housing controversy was fueled by deeper disagreements. It represented a direct confrontation between political opinions. The socialist members of the former CIHBM wanted to exclusively pursue collective, state-sponsored social housing, whereas liberal members in the IFHTP Bureau wanted to hold on to cooperative housing and voluntary action. Moreover, it represented a clash between different conceptions of the relation between housing and planning. The Bureau promulgated a comprehensive spatial planning discipline that included housing, whereas the former CIHBM executives insisted to treat housing as an independent specialization. Finally, it also represented a confrontation between the British “corporate culture” of the IFHTP (unanimity and honorary officers) and the more business-like continental culture of the former CIHBM (majority-voting and paid staff). When the IFHTP Bureau refused to give in, the dissatisfied continental housing reformers stepped outside the IFHTP to establish their own Internationaler Verband für das Wohnungswesen (1929) or simply the Verband with its seat in Frankfurt.

The departure of the dissatisfied housers did not restore internal peace in the IFHTP. Although the sectional division of membership was rapidly undone, many sympathizers with the Verband retained their IFHTP membership. Both organizations contested who was the heir apparent of the CIHBM. The IFHTP clearly stated that the Verband was the outcome of fierce contestations and negotiations in the Bureau of the IFHTP. However, the congress sessions hardly represented a clash between different conceptions of the relation between housing and planning. The Bureau promulgated a comprehensive spatial planning discipline that included housing, whereas the former CIHBM executives insisted to treat housing as an independent specialization. Finally, it also represented a confrontation between the British “corporate culture” of the IFHTP (unanimity and honorary officers) and the more business-like continental culture of the former CIHBM (majority-voting and paid staff). When the IFHTP Bureau refused to give in, the dissatisfied continental housing reformers stepped outside the IFHTP to establish their own Internationaler Verband für das Wohnungswesen (1929) or simply the Verband with its seat in Frankfurt.

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On Garden City Lines

The concise institutional history of the IFHTP reveals that the congresses of this organization did not present a neutral stage where all planning ideas and experiences could be put forward, nor could everybody participate. The congress agenda was the outcome of the planning ideas and experiences in the Bureau of the IFHTP. However, the congress sessions hardly reflected the conflictual nature of the Federation. At first sight, the congresses represented a proponent of technocratic internationalism (Schot & Lagendijk, 2008). Between the wars, transnationally active experts created neutral rostrums where they could discuss technical solutions for societies without their political annotations. We have to realize that the congresses of the IFHTP represented a regulated reality. The congress sessions offered lectures, not interactive discussions. The Bureau nominated the lecturers and session leaders. The invited experts had to be (politically) uncontroversial and adhere to the planning principles propagated by the IFHTP. There was a brief moment for discussion at the end of the sessions, but the session leaders discouraged dissent and controversial planning ideas, nor did the official congress reports document such ideas. Undeniably, the experts in the IFHTP predominantly approached housing and planning issues from an urban perspective, but already at an early hour, their dialogue touched town–country relations. As the planning profession broke with the traditional planning scale of the city extension in the early 1920s to explore regional and later national planning, the countryside soon became an object for planning on the drawing table.

The IFHTP started out as an international outlet for British garden city propaganda. The domestic policies of the GCTPA dictated the agenda of its congresses. As custodian of Ebenezer Howard’s spiritual legacy—Howard had established the organization himself in 1899 to promote his garden city idea—the GCTPA prided itself in the popularity of the garden city idea, both in Britain and abroad, but it resented the many promiscuous adaptations (Culpin, 1913). Howard (1898) had published his garden city revelation in a
small booklet titled *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*; a revised edition was published under the catchy title *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (1902). He blamed the large-scale migration of population from the countryside to the industrializing cities for most evils in urban and rural life. He proposed to solve this problem by combining the advantages of urban life with “all the beauty and delight of the country.” He envisioned the construction of a self-sufficient settlement or garden city outside the old, overcrowded city on cheap farmland. This garden city was to be a social experiment in community building on the basis of cooperative organization. To avoid the trappings of overpopulation and congestion, Howard drew a firm maximum population of about 32,000 inhabitants. Once the population reached this maximum, a new garden city had to be erected, creating a growing chain of garden cities, which he called *Social City*. Although often perceived as a mere city expansion model, Howard’s concept entailed much more. The Social City introduced a fundamental reorientation of town–country relations in which the old overcrowded megapolis would dissolve (Howard, 1902). Howard also saw the benefits of garden cities for the rural population: creating local markets and making urban amenities available. Especially Thomas Adams, the first Secretary of the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), was keen to stress the advantages of garden cities for the countryside (Hardy, 1991).

It was not until theory was tested at Letchworth Garden City (1903) that the garden city idea really took off. Once the garden city idea popularized, its original intentions soon diluted. Misunderstandings, practical adaptations along the way, and more fundamental reorientations to accommodate different (national) political, cultural, and constitutional realities produced a rather heterogeneous international movement under the garden city banner (Hall, 1996). The GCTPA partly had to blame itself for the confusion. Although it presented garden cities as the ultimate planning solution, it also endorsed town planning “on garden city lines” (garden suburbs and garden villages) to bring immediate relief. Town planning on “garden city lines” soon overshadowed the true garden city concept. Even worse, a lot of housing schemes on garden city lines just mimicked the design idiom of Letchworth without retaining the higher objectives of social reform through cooperative organization and land reform. Confronted with the diverse interpretation of the garden city idea, the British garden city workers set out to demonstrate the proper application of garden city principles. Thus, they turned the first IFHTP congress in England in 1914 into a grand tour along celebrated housing schemes “on garden city lines.” The delegates visited places such as Letchworth Garden city, Hampstead Garden suburb, and the model garden villages of Bourneville and Port Sunlight. The general reception was one of admiration, not unmixed with envy (Harris Brown, 1914). Ewart Culpin’s *The Garden City Movement Up-to-Date* (1913) served as a reference for the tour. In his book, Culpin reported on the remarkable advance of the garden city movement in Britain and abroad and provided a survey of approved garden city schemes in Britain. He stressed that community building through cooperative organization and land reform represented the key ingredient of the garden city idea. The first IFHTP congress emphasized this feature. Henry Vivian, chairman of the Co-Partnership Tenants Limited, delivered a keynote speech on co-partnership housing (Vivian, 1914). Co-partnership housing schemes such as the pioneering co-partnership suburb of Ealing near London featured prominently in the congress tour. All tenants were shareholders who thus benefited from profits made by the society in the shape of additional shares. Thus, the tenant became partner in the whole enterprise. Although a tenant could never claim the ownership of his house, the shareholding did create a feeling of co-ownership (Stuwt, 1914). This focus reflected the struggle of the GCTPA to get at terms with municipal housing and, even worse, speculative developments that lacked the higher social objectives of the garden city idea (Hardy, 1991). Moreover, it addressed the fact that abroad, most notably in France, garden city militants dismissed cooperative housing as impracticable (Dépinay, Dufourmantelle, & Risler, 1916).

During the First World War, the IFHTP launched its Belgium Reconstruction Campaign, after the war geographically expanded to include Northern France. The British garden city militants changed their strategy from sharing to instructing. At home, the British garden city workers had been tug-at-war for years about initiating a second garden city (Hardy, 1991). Now, on the other side of the Canal, an opportunity presented itself to implement Howard’s Social City. Thus, Ewin Culpin (1915) lashed out against continental faubourgs-jardins. Belgium was to adopt true independent garden cities. In their eagerness to transform Belgium into a model garden city nation, the British garden city militants forgot to account for the specific Belgian situation. They offered two roads toward a model garden city nation. Ebenezer Howard (1915) recommended concentrating on a model International Garden City on far more generous lines than witnessed at Letchworth that would serve as an enduring monument to the sanctity of treaties and the sacrifice of Belgium. However, C.B. Purdom, initiator of the National Garden Cities Committee (NGCC), urged the Belgians to set up a national garden cities program. This proposal reflected the ideas of the NGCC as disseminated through its well-known manifesto *New Towns After the War* (1918), published under the pseudonym the New Townsmen. Purdom proposed “unifying the rural population of Belgium into some social and economic grouping” (“The International Garden Cities and Town Planning Association,” 1919, p. 240). He did not adapt his garden cities program to Belgium; Belgium was to adapt to his program.

The Belgian and French audience ignored the British insistence on true garden cities. Continental Europe preferred low density housing in city extensions, suburbs, and new towns. Although these housing schemes often appropriated the garden city label, they actually had very little in
common with Howard’s original idea. They lacked self-sufficiency, cooperative organization, and or greenbelts.

The Belgian model tuindorp [garden village] of Batavia near Roulers summarized this continental preference. Architect planner Raphael Verwilghen presented this scheme at the IFHTP congress in London in 1920. Once the British leaders of the IFHTP realized that Continental Europe would not resort to true garden cities, they lost interest in the reconstruction campaign and reappraised the agenda of the international organization. Even in Britain, low density housing in suburbs and new settlements prevailed (Ward, 1994). Thus, C. B. Purdom and Raymond Unwin presented a new objective at the IFHTP congress in London in 1920: satellite towns. A satellite town basically was a garden suburb with the properties of a true independent garden city (Purdom, 1921). Purdom perfectly summarized the case for satellites with a bold proposal for a system of 23 satellite towns around London (IGCTPA, 1920). A year later, satellites would be endorsed as official GCTP policy (Purdom, 1921). The satellite idea failed to convince the foreign members. Grand satellite schemes did not produce mass affordable housing. The British cottage, the cornerstone of garden city schemes, had long been outstripped by cheaper continental apartments (Purdom, 1951; Oud, 1920). Nevertheless, the British satellite campaign persevered (Purdom & Chambers, 1922). The British members referred to leading captains of industry who favored industrial decentralization (IGCTPF, 1922) and the Business School of Columbia University, which had endorsed garden city planning, as the most efficient form of town planning (IGCTPF, 1923).

To evade growing continental reservations about the high construction costs of British satellites, the British garden city workers concentrated on regional planning at the IFHTP congress in Gothenburg in 1923. Criticisms of the garden city or satellite idea could no longer be ignored. Raymond Unwin attacked American planner Arthur C. Comey (1923) who had dismissed decentralization to new self-contained nuclei as unnatural and inefficient. The other lecturers supported the idea of decentralization, but considered merely projecting satellites in the countryside inadequate. German planner Gustav Langen slated German new settlements that lacked viable communities (IGCTPF, 1923). American planner John Nolen referred to pioneering business statistician Roger W. Babson who had predicted an unprecedented mass suburbanization due to the rapid innovations in transportation—especially the advance of the motorcar—and communication technology (IGCTPF, 1923). Both Langen and Nolen called for a comprehensive regional planning discipline to coordinate the (sub)urbanization of the countryside. The IFHTP had introduced regional planning to promote satellite planning, but this strategy backfired. The limitations of the planning concept were exposed.

Although housing reformers and planners across Europe admired British garden city experience, the IFHTP nevertheless was unsuccessful in selling the idea of Howard’s Social City and the fundamental reappraisal of town–country relations that came with it. According to the continental planners, the open layout was the only true innovation of British garden city experience (Bakker Schut, 1920). The IFHTP successfully popularized this open layout. The provision of affordable housing in a healthy environment preoccupied the minds of the planners flocking to the IFHTP. Decentralization represented the designated planning strategy. In the prevailing urban perspective, the countryside equaled cheap building land, waiting to be developed. The body of knowledge in the IFHTP also influenced (the design of) rural settlements. In Norway where industrialization lagged behind, IFHTP executive Christian Gierløff and his Norsk Forening av Boligreformer, a Norwegian housing reform association with an explicit orientation toward British garden city experience, had adapted the garden city ideology to agricultural settlements (“Garden Cities in Norway,” 1921-1922). The discussions at the IFHTP congresses barely touched conceptions of “the rural.” The assembled planners focused on settlements on garden city lines, which they predominantly perceived as housing enclaves in the countryside, and largely ignored relations with the rural community. Most housing schemes presented at the congresses did feature allotments, but this agricultural dimension also was not elaborated on.

### Mastering (Sub)Urbanization

After its Gothenburg congress, the IFHTP had to come up with a scientific regional planning framework to coordinate decentralization. Such became the formidable task for the IFHTP congress in Amsterdam in 1924. The satellite militants were joined by regional planning pioneers. Because the stakes were high, only representatives of proven experience were invited. This practical experience had to be (politically) undisputed and consistent with the British satellite idea (Bosma, 2003).

All lecturers placed regional planning in the context of (sub)urbanization and assumed that the pressing urban problems could only be properly solved from a regional perspective (Bosma, 1993; IFTCPGC, 1924; Pepler, 1924).

Patrick Abercrombie and Thomas Adams initiated their international audience into Anglo-Saxon regional planning experience. The former delivered a lecture on British regional survey experience. Undoubtedly, his highly influential regional plan for the Doncaster region had earned him his ticket to the Amsterdam congress. Abercrombie presented an overview of regional schemes in Britain and gave a summary of the headings of a regional survey: (a) physical—geology, climate, and so on; (b) historical; (c) commerce—business and industry; (d) population and housing; (e) health—comparison of conditions of environment and resulting public health; (f) means of communication; (g) open spaces; and (h) zoning—surface utilization and general tendencies of development. The latter tackled the subject of zoning. He identified four main zoning categories: (a) commerce, (b) residence, (c) recreation, and (d) agriculture. He stated
that the large cities suffered from the rapid growth of motor traffic and its demand on highways, the increasing trend of industry to relocate in suburban and rural areas and finally the excrescences of haphazard urban expansion. Proper zoning should control these circumstances. Adams illustrated his argument by referring to the Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs, which he supervised.

Robert Schmidt and Fritz Schumacher elaborated on German regional planning experience. As director of the regional plan for the Ruhr area, the former introduced the pioneering plan of the Ruhr area. A public corporation of the Ruhr municipalities, the Siedlungsverband Ruhrkohlenbezirk (1920) used intermunicipal planning to coordinate the expansion of the mining industry in the region and to protect the open countryside. Sound survey of the industrial ambitions and the terrains needed for housing, work, and leisure provided a firm base for the plan. The plan carefully considered allocation of estates with low-rise housing and large gardens in relation to traffic. It preserved strategically located forested areas near future colonies as recreational havens. The remainder of the region maintained an agricultural function and acted as a fluid greenbelt between the new mining colonies.

Schumacher did not present coordinated decentralization as the ultimate remedy for all urban evils. He provisioned city expansion in broad strips along arterial roads surrounded by nature, creating a “lobed” city. He wanted to design the metropolis as to gradually and systematically convert the architectural essence of its residential districts into nature, starting with the typology of the medium-sized city, gradually changing to the typology of the small town and finally ending in the village. (Schumacher, 1923, p. 23)

This regional planning model attributed a key position to open spaces as a means to order the transition from the city center into the country. The linked system of open spaces performed as a vital artery of the city. By embedding open spaces in the urban character of public spaces and representative buildings, Schumacher could create characteristic centers. He had brilliantly translated these principles in regional plans for Hamburg and Cologne.

In this grand display of regional planning, the Dutch hosts also played their part. Gerrit van Poelje analyzed foreign plans for Hamburg and Cologne. Schumacher did not present coordinated decentralization for urban renewal and tenement compounds. These papers in Amsterdam had explicitly put the old city on the map. Purdom and other satellite champions continued to focus on constructing new decentralized settlements, assuming the old cities would subsequently dissolve.

The amalgamation with the CIHBM and the subsequent housing controversy directly affected the congress agenda of the IFHTP. Although, on one hand, the IFHTP wanted to continue its successful exploration of a comprehensive regional planning discipline, on the other hand, it had to treat housing as an independent expertise. Thus, its congresses witnessed a rigid, at times artificial, separation between housing and planning sessions. The first independent housing session at the Vienna congress in 1926 discussed the “rational distribution of cottage and tenement houses” (IFHTP, 1926). The congress delegates condemned the advance of tenement compounds in inner Vienna and the municipal Siedlungen (settlements), reflecting the general consensus among housing professionals between the wars (Bauer, 1934). Nevertheless, the IFHTP could no longer ignore inner-city developments and the advance of apartment blocks. Its following congresses scrutinized the conditions for urban renewal and tenement compounds. These issues featured prominently in the discussions on slum clearance, as a majority regretted the substitution of (unfit) houses for blocks of flats (Geertse, 2012).

The planning sessions initially built on the outcomes of the Amsterdam congress, although the concept of regional
decentralization was soon found wanting. Despite the advancing suburbanization, the old overcrowded and congested cities did not dissolve. The IFHTP had to pay more attention to the existing cities. For its congress in Rome in 1929, it turned its attention to the historic city centers that suffered from urban redevelopments and the growing traffic volume. The discussions focused on the Italian obsession with preserving the historical city centers, an obsession that had become government policy under the fascist regime (Medina Lasansky, 2004; Painter, 2007; Piccinato, 2006). Gustavo Giovannoni (1931) perfectly summarized this obsession. The foreign delegates endorsed the Italian strategy to isolate the historic city heart from modern developments. New (decentralized) definite centers had to avoid the redevelopment of historic city hearts.

The Rome congress also addressed the issue of the regulation of town extensions. The assembled planners explicitly rejected traditional city growth in the form of a widening circle. City extension should be taken up at the level of the regional plan on the basis of a thorough survey. Two different regional planning concepts, one of British origin and one of German origin, rivaled for the acknowledgment of the international audience. Leading planners such as Patrick Abercrombie, George Pepler and Raymond Unwin from Britain, Thomas Adams from the United States, Robert Schmidt from Germany, French urbanist Marcel Poëte, and Danish planner Aage Bjerre advocated coordinated decentralization to satellites. Among these planning experts, especially the regional planning proposals for London, which Raymond Unwin had prepared as advisor of the Greater London Regional Planning Committee, were much admired. Also the miners’ settlements of the Ruhrkohlenbezirk posed a major influence as the regional planning practice of the Ruhr area was copied throughout Germany. At the IFHTP congress in Berlin in 1931, the satellite supporters fiercely opposed the advance of high rise business premises. Coupled with the continued migration of population to the urban periphery, these inner-city high rise developments only added to the intensification of traffic pressure. Pepler urged to redefine the old strategy of regional decentralization. He introduced the concept of regional centralization, which was to reconcile and coordinate concentration within given areas and decentralization of other areas (IFHTP, 1931; Pepler, 1931). Adams eloquently supported Pepler’s plea in his influential Recent Advances in Town Planning (Adams, Thompson, Fry, & Adams, 1932). The “lobed” city militants advocated regional city extensions in broad strips along radial arterial roads, reserving the cheaper land in between for park systems. This group included planner Fritz Schumacher and town planning professor Roman Heiligenthal from Germany, Viennese Stadtbaudirektor Franz Musil, and leading Italian planner Cesare Chiodi (IFHTP, 1929; Pepler, 1929). Schumacher’s regional plans for Hamburg and Cologne (IFTCPGC, 1924) perfectly represented their planning approach, which later would be implemented in the famous Amsterdam Extension Plan (1934).

Ever since the Amsterdam congress of 1924, the desirability of a national plan to coordinate regional plans increasingly occupied the minds of the planning experts in the IFHTP. By the mid-1930s, the optimists even contemplated international planning, especially with regard to the increased mobility of society (IFHTP, 1935; “Positive Planning,” 1935-1936). For its Stockholm congress in 1939, the IFHTP for the first time reserved a session to take stock of national planning experience. Swedish planner Albert Lilienberg, the general reporter of the session, concluded that the national reports received evidenced a significant increase of regional planning and a growing involvement of the State in planning matters. This involvement predominantly amounted to State projects and national infrastructure plans. Only Germany could pride itself in a comprehensive regime for national and regional planning. Soviet planners did not participate in the IFHTP, so they could not report on the Five Years Plans (Bodenschatz & Post, 2004). The Reichsstelle für Raumordnung orchestrated the Nazi planning apparatus. This central bureau appointed a special directorate for the preparation of a regional plan. The members of the directorate represented the various interests within the region concerned. The State covered half of the expenses of these directorates, the communal authorities, and other interested parties within the affected region paid for the additional costs. Lilienberg observed that the German State planning bureau only administered the drafting of national and regional plans, not the execution of these plans. Execution was taken up by the local authorities after detailed planning had been done in accordance with the regional plans (IFHTP, 1939; Pepler, 1939).

The “urban perspective” continued to dominate the regional planning discussions in the IFHTP. The transnational planning dialogue no longer exclusively propagated population dispersal to decentralized settlements. As (sub)urbanization swept the Western World, the focus turned to controlling haphazard urban growth. The planning discussions in the IFHTP approached town–country relations ambiguously. The participating planners acknowledged a servitude of the countryside toward the city. The countryside had to accommodate urban satellites and had to provide opportunities for leisure to playful urbanites. However, the planners also endeavored to protect the open countryside against the expanding city. Their regional planning schemes served to prevent the open countryside from falling into one giant suburban mass. They increasingly perceived town and country as a continuum. The city was to expand into the countryside in an orderly fashion (settlements and infrastructure), and simultaneously, the countryside was to enter the city. Comprehensive regional park systems had to coordinate the two movements.

**Planning the Countryside**

In the steadily expanding planning universe of the IFHTP, it was only a matter of time before the planning of the countryside would be addressed at an IFHTP congress. For its
planner John Nolen intimated that he considered planning a
town. Other delegates dismissed this liberal view. American
was a local issue. Central planners had to exercise restraint
Parliament Lord Phillimore stressed that country planning
However, the protagonists of a rural perspective presented
(“Review of the International Congress,” 1935). These papers upheld a pastoral conception of rural areas,
which quintessentially was informed by a purely “urban perspective.” These papers urged to preserve the open coun-
try side in the face of advancing suburbanization and to provide
allotments and amenities for leisure to playful urbanites. Other reports stressed the importance to acknowledge the
rural context in country planning efforts and not to make rural conditions subordinate to urban requirements.

The national reports by Danish landscape architect Carl
Theodor Sørensen and Robert de Souza of the French Society
of Urbanists represented the pastoral approach toward coun-
try planning. Sørensen emphasized the necessity to open the
country side to the suburbs of Copenhagen. He did not worry
about possible negative side effects of mass use of the coun-
tryside for leisure and allotments. He perceived the natural
surroundings of the city as places to enrich city life, as shared
heritage of the population, so securing easy access from the
city to the sea, rivers, lakes, and forests was a principal
objective of the country planner. Sørensen attributed key
importance to a proper landscape design of rural areas,
clearly distancing his approach from “barbaric” practices in
infrastructure construction. New developments in the coun-
tryside should not amount to an exercise of planning tech-
niques for urban transformation. Nature was also the ideal
tool to cure aesthetic rural areas that had already been spoilt
by chaotic construction. Robert de Souza largely seconded
Sørensen’s concerns and objectives. He warned not to
approach the countryside with urban planning techniques.
This would result in agricultural landscapes fragmented by
infrastructure, or, even worse, by large-scale construction
projects on cheap farmland. He called for a comprehensive
design on the basis of aesthetic principles that would meet
the needs of agriculture without compromising the natural
beauty of the countryside.

Other planners stressed the rural dimension of country
planning. Verhagen recognized a danger in approaching the
countryside as mere playground for urbanites. He perceived
the countryside as a place of agricultural production, not a
mere recreational playground (Riboldazzi, 2010). Lord
Phillimore dismissed allotments: “Simple-lifers living on
their own potatoes and eggs will not save this country”
(“Review of the International Congress,” 1935, p. 127).
However, the protagonists of a rural perspective presented
different approaches to country planning. British Member of
Parliament Lord Phillimore stressed that country planning
was a local issue. Central planners had to exercise restraint
and let free market enterprise regulate agricultural produc-
tion. Other delegates dismissed this liberal view. American
planner John Nolen intimated that he considered planning a
science of wholes. He dismissed a strict separation between
city planning, country planning, and national planning.
Phillimore’s view was also refuted by national reports that
reported on national country planning and State colonization
projects.

The German national report by far received the most
attention (Internationaler Verband für Wohnungswesen und
Städtetbau, 1935; “Review of the International Congress,”
1935). Architect D. Köster initiated the international audi-
cence into the technicalities of the comprehensive Nazi regime
for Landesplanung, conveniently sidestepping the poten-
tially controversial political connotations of race building.
The Nazi planners devoted many of their planning efforts to
the objectives of ruralization, a permanent peasant class, and
new forms of community. The Third Reich advocated the
dissolution of the industrial city and the promotion of Volk as
key steps in the creation of an ideal national-socialist state. A
central agency, the Reichsheimstättenamt, had been set up in
1933 to implement the Nazi resettlement policy. This agency
aimed to reduce cities to a population of no more than
100,000 people, directing the overflow population to small
communities in rural settings. This policy met heavy opposi-
tion. Large farm operators, militarists, and industrialists
feared that the ruralization campaign threatened food pro-
duction. However, some planners recognized an opportunity
to establish garden villages on the urban fringe, to decrease
urban densities, to abolish Mietskaserne, and to address
urban blight. Ultimately, the people concerned vehemently
opposed forced resettlement, forcing the Reichsheimstättenamt
to reassess its resettlement policy.

Anti-urbanism remained a characteristic of Nazi plan-
ing. This orientation colored the settlement, agricultural
expansion, and regionalization policies, particularly the
Hereditary Farm Act and the Settlement Act. The Nazi plan-
ners wanted to develop alternatives to the centralized city in
the form of (small) farms, smallholdings, and privately
owned homes at the urban fringe with a garden (Heimstätte).
Conceptually, these new communities served several goals.
Designed as self-sustaining units in a regional vernacular
style, they created a sense of Heimat, thus enhancing the
“folkish spirit.” They had to alleviate the overcrowded cities,
while providing much-needed employment and increased
food production. Minister Hans Kerll, the head of the
Reichsstelle für Raumordnung, also included the eugenic
objective of increasing the “biological folkish-strength”
(Volkskraft). The concepts of Lebensraum and Geopolitik
defined the Nazi resettlement policies. The strategic alloca-
tion of these settlements, the forms of community conceived,
and the legislation used to enforce implementation added up
to a national planning effort to change the communitarian
character of the nation that would culminate in the fatal
Ostkolonisation (Bosma, 1993, pp. 279-299; Mullin, 1982;
Rössler, 1994; Rössler & Schleiermacher, 1993).

Besides the German national planning regime for rural
development, especially the State projects of reclaimed
polders in Italy and the Netherlands presented examples of planned rural development that were well received by the delegates. Dutch landscape architect Pieter Verhagen reported on the progress at the reclaimed polders in the Zuyderzee. He concluded that in the industrializing cities, people had previously flocked from rural areas to the city, but now, this migration had reversed, threatening the open countryside. To alleviate the manifesting problems, planners had to fundamentally reconsider their profession. Verhagen did not refer to the planning instruments at hand, but to the cultural attitude toward these instruments. Planners had to reconsider their containment strategies to preserve the countryside. Instead, they had to focus on the matrices in the composition of landscapes and to reconcile the layers of nature, economy, and community that had shaped the region. Verhagen introduced the term vertical landscape, a design strategy that used these layers as basic building blocks to construct a landscape and that included employment, farmers’ culture, and the inhabitants that make the local community in the planning process.

The presentation of Italian architect Luigi Piccinato seconded Verhagen’s argument. Piccinato proposed to eliminate the distinction between urban and rural planning. The crisis of the city, as well as the one of the countryside, required that planners regarded town and country as a whole. Piccinato urged not to approach country planning from the perspective of urban interests. He considered country planning foremost an agricultural issue. Especially in countries where agriculture played an important role—such as in Italy—planners should not look from urban agglomerations to the countryside, but the other way around. Unlike in the past, planners did not just have to restore town–country relations by securing sufficient public green space. They had to provide a new spatial organization of farm, hamlet, and town in the countryside for a new (agricultural) economy that preserved open spaces and secured food production for the cities. He presented the area of Lazio Sabaudia and the reclaimed polders in the Pontine Marshes as the best example of the work being done in Italy in this field. According to Piccinato, this valuable experience could be copied in different contexts on the condition that the organization and control of urban development, housing, and industrial markets on one hand and rural development on the other hand were properly balanced.

The Dutch and Italian internal colonization projects reflected the duality of Nazi rural development policies. On one hand, they professed an anti-urban tendency and reflected and idealized traditional norms of the peasant class, while on the other hand, they combined these norms with modern—scientific—production techniques and a new economy of scales. These planned rural development schemes ultimately served to secure food production and to create a new, improved rural society of exemplary civilians. Every attempt was made through planning and architectural design to visualize this rural ideal. Only settlers with impeccable backgrounds were admitted (Caprotti, 2007; Ofteland, 2002; Steenhuis, 2007; Van der Grift, 2013). However, the rural planning session of the IFHTP congress in London did not really explore these aspects of European rural planning. Despite their rhetoric, the participating planning experts largely stuck to their familiar trade of spatial coordination (land use planning or zoning). They did refer to agriculture and a “new economy” but did not elaborate on the attempts at agricultural reform, such as scientific farming and agricultural co-operativism. They did refer to a new community but did not scrutinize the rigid selection procedures to select settlers nor the strict social order imposed. Surveying the diversity among the national reports, the session leader Edward Percy Everest, vice president of the Rural District Councils Association, concluded that country planning was still in a stage of infancy in most countries. The assembled experts did agree that the countryside should be planned positively from the perspective of the countryside not just negatively from an urban perspective. They also agreed that advanced country planning should include settlement development and (social) amenities (Internationaler Verband für Wohnungswesen und Städtebau, 1935).

Conclusion

How to summarize the main points of this article? First, the case of the IFHTP between the wars demonstrates that Saunier’s Urban Internationale offers interesting leads to place “rural” issues in wider, transnational and international, comparative frameworks. The Urban Internationale also presented an international arena to discuss definitions of and actions on the countryside and town–country relations. Rural historians have already discovered the potential of international institutions such as the International Labour Organisation (Ribi Forclaz, 2011) but so far have ignored the transnational platforms in the field of spatial planning—such as the IFHTP—although these platforms did concern themselves with the planning of the countryside.

Second, in the first half of the 20th century, planning was not a rigidly defined profession, nor was there a strict separation between urban and country planning. Following the observations of Chabard (2009) about the advance of city planning in the United States, we can distinguish between two competing approaches to planning in the IFHTP: planning as a kind of civic action for reform and planning as an emerging autonomous profession. The latter gained importance during the Belgium Reconstruction Campaign and eventually ousted the former in the early 1920s. Branding oneself as a planner meant actively partaking in the definition of this rapidly expanding, fresh discipline. Internationalization was crucial to this strategy. According to Saunier (2001), it allowed creating a sense of an international peer group, to share the latest experiences, to try to set common professional standards, and to build a network of advisors and supporters. Transnational expert platforms such as the IFHTP could successfully cater for this demand, because of the absence of prominent international institutions in this field between the wars.
Third, when we scrutinize the planning discourse in the IFHTP, we can track the evolution of country planning and the attitude of planners toward the rural and the countryside. Initially, planners focused on promoting controlled population dispersal to the countryside to improve housing conditions and to alleviate the overcrowded and congested city. They predominantly perceived the countryside as cheap farmland, waiting to be developed. In the 1920s, the advancing urbanization made propagation of decentralized settlements redundant. The planners turned their attention to mastering (sub)urbanization. The planning profession broke with the traditional planning scale of the city extension to explore regional and later national planning. In these grand schemes, the countryside was predominantly planned from a negative perspective. The planners resorted to containment strategies to confine urbanization and protect the open countryside as a recreational refuse for urbanites. Although this negative planning approach persisted among planning experts, by the mid-1930s, it was challenged by a country planning approach that urged to plan the country positively from a rural (agricultural) perspective.

Finally, the planning discourse in the IFHTP did not just focus on ideal models for the coordination of town–country relations. The planners gathering at the IFHTP congresses did not fail to notice that the instrumentation at hand fell short to implement their visions of comprehensive planning. According to leading planner Thomas Adams, town planning was art of the possible (Geertse, 2012). Piccinato (2005) argues that 20th century planning was primarily focused on control over land (use, ownership, and land values) the key to get a grip on the urban explosion. Therefore, the planning sessions at the IFHTP congresses continuously assessed the state of town planning legislation in the participating countries and the land policies that were part of this legislation. Besides the control of land, the planning experts struggled with the consequences of increasing motorcar ownership (Brown, Taylor, & Morris, 2009; Mumford, 1963). At the planning sessions at the IFHTP congresses, the planners continuously reassessed their planning concepts to accommodate increased automobile, focusing on regulation and containment of traffic flows, while securing accessibility and safety.

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1. The International Federation underwent several name changes in this period: International Garden Cities and Town planning Association (1913-1922), International Garden Cities and Town Planning Federation (1922-1923), International Federation for Town and Country Planning and Garden Cities (1924-1925), and International Federation for Housing and Town Planning (IFHTP; 1926-1958). For the sake of clarity, this article only refers to the organization under its last moniker (IFHTP).

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