



Martin Wagner in America: planning and the political economy of capitalist urbanization

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ABSTRACT

Martin Wagner's contribution to planning thought and management during the Weimar Republic is widely known, but he recedes into obscurity afterwards. However, he maintained a tenacious intellectual activity in his American exile, conducting teaching-oriented research as Associate Professor of Planning at Harvard Graduate School of Design and prolonging these explorations until his passing in 1957. Working with students and other colleagues – most prominently Walter Gropius – Wagner devised comprehensive proposals for an alternative regional urbanization pattern that combined radical city-core renewal for conspicuous services and high-end residence with a massive suburbanization of middle- and working-class housing and industrial activities. This scheme exacerbated his earlier conceptions and simultaneously incorporated new inflections stemming from a critical engagement with contemporary debates in the US, which allow a better understanding of his German period and the transatlantic transfer of planning ideologies. At Harvard, Wagner reinforced the political-economic perspective of his work, following a contradictory imperative to secure the implementation of proposals by assimilating capital's spatiality in design strategies. Taking the dynamics of profit-oriented urbanization to their logical conclusion, the American Wagner envisioned a dark albeit consistent 'diagram' of the potential reach of a stark capitalist approach to territorial restructuring, prefiguring major urban shifts in subsequent decades.


KEYWORDS

Martin Wagner; capitalist urbanization; political economy; urban renewal; suburbanization; new towns

He [*sic*] who plays with capital must pay tribute to capital. (Wagner, 1949, *New Town Economy*, 13)

Introduction

In 1944, *Popular Science* provided its readers with thrilling news: the town of the future was at hand. According to the project's mastermind, existing 'large cities [were] rotten to the core';¹ they should be superseded by a new settlement pattern that completely refigured traditional relations between urban cores and their hinterlands. The challenge was not only socially urgent but, more importantly, financially viable. The comic-like drawings in the piece depicted an unwieldy architectural hybrid occupying an extensive park area, with 1200-foot long slab blocks towering above a circular low-rise

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¹Rowson, "Are Big Cities," 103.

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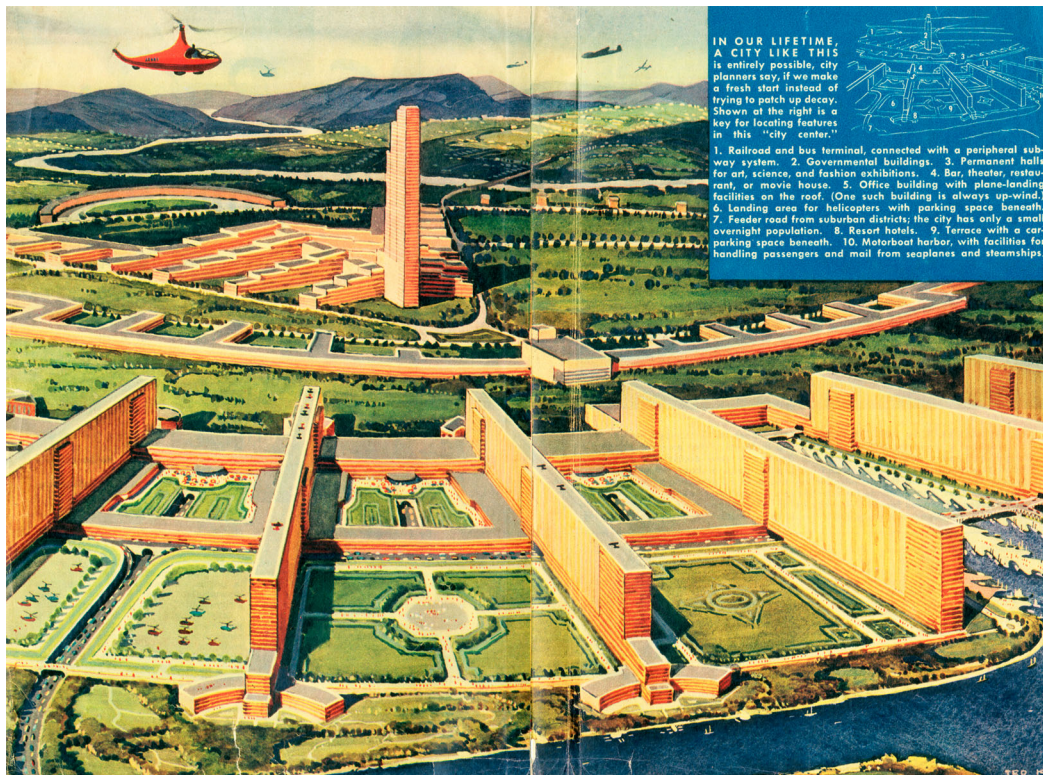


Figure 1. Proposal for the rehabilitation of Boston, as published in *Popular Science* in 1944. Source: Rowsome Jr., "Are Big Cities," 104–5.

building, formal gardens, and transport infrastructures, under a firmament teeming with aircrafts (Figure 1). In the background, a sprawling residential tapestry dissolved into the horizon. According to *Popular Science*, '[m]ost citizens live [now] in small, country communities ... industry is dispersed'; the erstwhile city had entirely become a sophisticated service hub within a broader urban organism, 'where people gather[ed] to do business, purchase goods, and go to ... movies or museums'.² The audacious vision was an enigmatic step for Martin Wagner, the 'distinguished German architect' behind the proposal, ex-chief planner of Berlin's City Council and former supercilious critic of blue-sky urban utopias. The illustrations did not portray a fantasy space. It was the scheme Wagner and his students at Harvard Graduate School of Design (GSD) had conceived for the transformation of the 'mammoth [monster] of ugliness, inefficiency, and distortion' that had become of Boston's metropolitan area.³

This was not the only time Wagner's work was disseminated in bizarre outlets upon arrival in the US, fleeing as he did from Nazi Germany after three years in Turkey. In 1940, *The Christian Science Monitor* discussed his proposal for a linear 'city of tomorrow' devised to restructure New England highways' ribbon development, a 'string-town' organized in land use bands reminiscent of soviet de-urbanism.⁴ In America he also wrote for cultural journals and addressed non-expert audiences

²Ibid., 103–4.

³Ibid., 103.

⁴*The Christian Science Monitor*, "Lineal Community Forecast as the 'City of Tomorrow,'" Boston edition, April 5, 1940, 13.

in an attempt to convince the general public of the futility of prevailing urban ‘rehabilitation’ arrangements and the necessity of adopting radical but feasible alternative approaches.⁵ Perhaps the somewhat random character of these interventions has led scholars to dismiss Wagner’s contribution in the 1940s and 1950s as irrelevant to the evolution of planning thought. Lacking built work, almost without projects or graphic elaborations, and facing hostility within and outside Modernist officialdom for his uncompromising criticism of colleagues, he is shoved out of the historical picture after the experience in Berlin.⁶ Despite ongoing efforts to restore his legacy, Wagner’s post-Stadtbaurat career remains poorly known and his American period has attracted even less attention.⁷ However, he kept writing intensively until his passing in 1957, publishing numerous articles in German and American professional journals, and, more importantly, devoting himself to 12 years of passionate research-based teaching. G. Holmes Perkins, faculty colleague and department chair, later praised Wagner’s ‘twenty-four hours a day’ commitment to students, relating that he ‘never saw anybody so dedicated in [his] life’.⁸ In their collective explorations the pupils reciprocated the enthusiasm of the self-defined ‘most radical and most subversive Harvard professor’,⁹ whom some revered as the institution’s ‘star teacher’ at that time.¹⁰ Beyond the influence on students, Wagner’s scholarship materialized in a collection of texts that, in spite of their consistency and polished structure, remain unpublished and so far only partially analysed.

This article explores Wagner’s proposals for a new urban pattern in the 1940s and 1950s, developed solo, with Walter Gropius, or with GSD students. I will focus particularly on elements of urban political economy, which he considered his pioneering contribution.¹¹ At a time when, as he constantly decried, Modernist architecture and planning skimmed on attention to socioeconomic aspects,¹² Wagner provided a bridge between the sphere of experimental urban design and the arid world of accountancy, between aesthetic speculation and administrative and economic implementation. Manfredo Tafuri famously regarded the German Wagner as the epitome of a generation of technicians that abandoned the refuge of artistic consolations so as to descend into the rough and tumble of everyday municipal management.¹³ An in-depth scrutiny of the American years, however, reveals that his was a visionary realism. By internalizing the logic of capitalist urbanization, his Harvard proposals prefigured future morphological, social, and regulatory transformations and their conflicts.

⁵See e.g. Wagner and Gropius, “Cities’ Renaissance”; Wagner, “The Future of Our Cities,” Martin Wagner Papers (MWP), Harvard Frances Loeb Library, folder 17/3, typescript lecture delivered at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Boston, November 10, 1943; “Community Planning,” MWP folder 22, typescript lecture, n.d., 22 pp.; “Städtebau – Bankrott,” MWP folder 5, typescript lecture delivered at the Deutschen Verband für Wohnungswesen, Städtebau und Raumplanung, Frankfurt am Main, January 5, 1953, 45.

⁶Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War*, 341, suggests that a bellicose character led Wagner to oblivion. Among the targets of his overt criticism were Le Corbusier (Wagner, “Städtebauliche Probleme der Großstadt,” 103; “Bauen für die Massen,” 272), Robert Moses (Wagner, “Intervention,” 16; “Defense Defects,” MWP folder 16, typescript, 1950), or Karl Bonatz (Diefendorf, “Berlin on the Charles,” 351). He even accused his former friend Walter Gropius of conformism and obstructionism in the use of their collective work, a clash which probably dated back to 1947, when Gropius failed to acknowledge Wagner’s part in the ideas he presented at CIAM VI in Bridgewater. See Diefendorf, “Berlin on the Charles,” 352; Gropius, “Urbanism.”

⁷There are some notable exceptions, although usually with only a secondary focus on Wagner’s design conceptions in the US. See Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism*, 139–41, 174, 180–4; Pearlman, *Inventing American Modernism*; and, especially, Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War*, 142–3, 182–6, 302, 341; “Berlin on the Charles”; “From Germany to America.” For the late Weimar period, see Scarpa, *Martin Wagner e Berlino*, 148–76. Wagner, *Das wachsende Haus*, has been recently re-edited. Homann, Kieren, and Scarpa, *Martin Wagner*, 158–78; and especially B. Wagner, *Martin Wagner*, provide general biographical perspectives.

⁸Quoted in Pearlman, *Inventing American Modernism*, 89.

⁹Letter to Gov. Ch. Herter, MWP folder 12/27, March 14, 1954.

¹⁰Oberlander, “Advancing Interdisciplinarity,” 6.

¹¹Wagner, “Unwirtschaftlichkeit der Millionenstädte,” 283.

¹²Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 64.

¹³Tafuri, “Sozialpolitik.”

Scholars have suggested a fundamental caesura after Wagner left the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) and subsequently lost his position as Berlin Stadtbaurat.¹⁴ Actually, in the US, he prolonged earlier reflections on crucial topics such as the role of urban cores in the capitalist metropolis, the reshaping of community space through suburbanization schemes for the working and middle classes, or the need to restructure the role of diverse political and economic actors in accordance with the evolution of real estate and capital formations, as well as the technician's position in that field of forces. Attentive to contemporary institutional and corporate discourses but freed from former managerial compromises, the American Wagner extended these concerns to put forward an 'ideal type', a diagram of capitalist spatial restructuring, taking ideas that in Berlin were only in embryo or repressed by everyday praxis to their logical conclusion. In that sense his theoretical production at Harvard allows a better understanding of the Weimar period.

At the same time, his imagination of postwar urbanization incorporated an as yet unproblematized but fundamental development of previous positions. Wagner increasingly relied on capital's own substance, i.e. political economy, to conceive his schemes, rendering territorial organization a variable dependent on capital circulation, as expressed through statistics and balance sheets, notions of finance, and economic geography. This led him to flounder on the limits and contradictions of his political creed, and he came to conclude that 'there is no compromise possible between socialism and capitalism ... especially not in [the US]'. In order to enhance existing urban conglomerates, technicians would have to 'compromise [themselves] to improve drastically the capitalistic system' and accelerate urbanization dynamics so as to explore its redistributive potentialities.¹⁵ As we will see, this bare-bones insight into the logic of capital's flow through built environments, stretched to the point of mirroring its ideology, endowed Wagner's American work with a prescient, dark dimension, which anticipated the processes of displacement and extended commodification that characterized subsequent urban formations in Europe and the US.

Contexts between Berlin and Cambridge

Wagner's concerns during the 1940s and 1950s were incipient in his later years in Germany,¹⁶ when the conflicts in Berlin made him oscillate between a compromise with local stakeholders and a critical evaluation of the limits of municipal management. A preliminary outline of his approach to the political economy of urbanization can be found in the 1929 talk 'Städtebauliche Probleme der Großstadt' (Planning problems of the metropolis).¹⁷ Addressed to an audience with local businessmen interested in the renewal of Berlin's city centre, it already contained Wagner's demand for rigorous analyses of local economy and municipal finance, synthesized in the queries, 'How much does Berlin cost? Do you have the necessary capital to renovate the city? ... And does it pay off?'¹⁸ In consonance with his inclination to adopt entrepreneurial criteria in municipal management, Wagner sketched an assessment of the investment value of Berlin, understanding the city as a concentration of fixed capital. He suggested that, in order to implement a holistic rebuilding programme, it was essential to transform existing property and regulatory regimes, advancing new, communal forms of land ownership (*Gemeineigentum*), and imposing compulsory amortization of real-estate assets in 25-year

¹⁴ Scarpa, *Martin Wagner e Berlino*, 151–64; Tafuri, "Sozialpolitik," 224–30.

¹⁵ Letter to W. Wurster, quoted in Oberlander and Newbrun, *Houser*, 212.

¹⁶ For an in-depth analysis of this period, see Scarpa, *Martin Wagner e Berlino*; Tafuri, "Sozialpolitik"; and Homann, Kieren, and Scarpa, *Martin Wagner*.

¹⁷ Wagner, "Städtebauliche Probleme der Großstadt."

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

cycles.¹⁹ In the absence of such changes, planners should rely on small, isolated renovation projects, devising flexible strategies that shifted with value fluctuations in order to capture investment and the population's 'consumption power' (*Konsumkraft*) in the city core.²⁰ In line with his contemporary initiatives for Alexanderplatz and Potsdamer Platz, the main squares and central areas became stages for permanent shopping sprees. Implicit in this approach was Wagner's contradictory assimilation of Reichsbank President Hjalmar Schacht's austerity restrictions, which strangled financial sources for so-called unproductive – i.e. not immediately lucrative – investment in local welfare programmes in the late 1920s. The association of urbanization with a profit imperative would remain a longstanding feature of Wagner's subsequent conceptions.

Between the split with the SPD in 1931 and his dismissal as Stadtbaurat in 1933 Wagner began working in a more systematic hypothesis for a general restructuring of settlement patterns. This endeavour was first substantiated in his exploration of residential and industrial decentralization in *Das wachsende Haus* and, especially, in *Die neue Stadt im neuen Land*.²¹ This brief, cryptic booklet contains an intriguing combination of garden-city figurations with Bruno Taut's postwar intuitions about an organic development of communal political-economic units and, more remarkably, Miliutin's *Sotsgorod* model, published four years before.²² Wagner defined his regional vision as a *Stadt-Land-Stadt* (town-country-town), composed of linear settlements around transport infrastructures, shaping *Stadtschaften* (townships) of 5000 inhabitants with their corresponding agricultural *Nahrungsspielräume* (spaces of nourishment, hinterlands), in turn articulated in broader urban systems of 25,000 inhabitants.²³ His earlier ideas about the role of the city centre were now reframed through Taut's notion of a *Stadtkrone* (city crown) providing specialized services for the whole region.²⁴ This model, discussed in 1934 in a rudimentary fashion and without graphic support, was the basis for subsequent experiments with students at the GSD.

The proposal of a dual territory, divided in tertiary nodes and a dispersed, low-density residential-industrial fabric was far removed from the contemporary high-density artefacts that prevailed in the Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne (CIAM), a group to which Wagner did not belong officially despite occasional participations in conferences and reports in the meetings of Athens and Paris.²⁵ In fact his work at that time anticipated CIAM's ulterior attention to lower density patterns and community building,²⁶ as well as their exploration of city reconstruction and the role of urban centres,²⁷ providing also a detailed consideration of elements of policy and economic management which were completely absent from the group's interventions.

At all events, Wagner's work was much more influenced by the national context he had to navigate in the New World than it was by international debates. Indeed his experience can help to nuance our understanding of the longer trajectory of transatlantic planning exchange and refine existing periodizations thereof.²⁸ He knew first-hand the reality of American cities through previous trips and had synthesized the lessons Germany could learn from them in his book *Städtebauliche Probleme in amerikanischen Städten und ihre Rückwirkung auf den deutschen Städtebau* (*Planning problems of*

¹⁹Ibid., 104.

²⁰Ibid., 106.

²¹Wagner, *Das wachsende Haus*, 35–6; Wagner, *Die neue Stadt*.

²²Taut, *Die Stadtkrone*; Miliutin, *Sotsgorod*.

²³Wagner, *Die neue Stadt*, 3–4, 21–3.

²⁴Ibid., 24.

²⁵Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse*, 95, 111.

²⁶Domhardt, "Humanization of Urban Life."

²⁷Sert, *Can our Cities Survive?*; Sert, Tyrwhitt, and Rogers, *Heart of the City*.

²⁸See the special issue of *Planning Perspectives*, vol. 29, no. 2, on the postwar exchange of planning ideas between Europe and the USA; Hein, "The Exchange of Planning Ideas."

American cities and their repercussions on German urbanism). At the same time, in the US he strove to adapt ideas and models derived from personal experience and European traditions to his adopted country, and after the Second World War he contributed to debates in both Germany and the US through his publications. In that sense, Wagner could be regarded as an archetypal, early embodiment of the circular transfer of knowledge that characterized an emergent international formation of planning expertise. And yet he hardly participated in international meetings while in the US and remained very much a product of national-state planning frameworks, focused on existing local and regional regulatory agendas and power conglomerates that shaped and ultimately hindered his proposals. His case suggests that transatlantic debates were non-cumulative and experienced regression in the late 1930s and 1940s, at a time when the institutional environment was all but propitious for cross-cultural transfer.²⁹

The arrival in the US, in August 1938,³⁰ must have been exhilarating, at a time of ardent discussions amidst timid economic expansion, federal recovery projects and the echoes of war drums from Europe after the Austrian Anschluss. The ashes of Franklin D. Roosevelt's first brain trust were still warm. Rexford G. Tugwell had quitted the Resettlement Administration in late 1936 and Arthur E. Morgan had just been removed from the Tennessee Valley Authority. Their brainchildren, Norris, Tennessee, and the Greenbelt towns, built between 1933 and 1937, were still in their infancy and became fundamental influences for Wagner's subsequent work.³¹ In 1934 and 1935, Catherine Bauer and Henry Wright had published auspicious major contributions which presented Berlin experiences under Wagner as an example for future American housing.³² At the same time, the federal government was embarking on a new programme to promote urbanization, infrastructural, and residential developments with interventions such as the National Resources Committee's 1937 report *Our Cities: Their Role in the National Economy* and the Wagner–Steagall Act from the same year, or the inception of a new national highway system in 1939, in a framework that seemed to prolong previous federal planning endeavours.

Wagner quickly found his bearings in the ongoing debate about city rehabilitation. At that time, most academics, reformers, and the federal government considered slum clearance a prerequisite for the building of new low-rent housing.³³ Realtors themselves, along with architects, joined this consensus shortly afterwards, amidst deceleration of conventional building activity during the war. The discussion soon became embedded in a broader debate about prospective postwar reconstruction and development patterns,³⁴ coinciding with Wagner's debut as coordinator of design studios at the GSD. His work with students during these early American years, usually in collaboration with Walter Gropius, incorporates contemporary conflicts and agendas, ranging from the alarm of real-estate owners, concerned with the impact of decentralization and obsolescence on property values,³⁵ to proposals for the renovation of blighted city areas and their connection to a more efficient solution for metropolitan transportation,³⁶ and the attempt to implement 'new conceptions in

²⁹CIAM, for instance, came to a temporary standstill and the networks providing a platform for more consistent postwar exchange were developed after Wagner retired or died. See Joch, "Must Our Cities"; Wakeman, "Rethinking Postwar Planning History."

³⁰Wagner, *Martin Wagner*, 49.

³¹Wagner, "American Versus German City," 336; and Gropius and Wagner, "Housing as a Townbuilding," 6, mention both experiences as a reference for students. Wagner often used the Greenbelt Towns' building costs as an example; see Wagner, *New Town Economy*, 10. The Frances Loeb Library holds Wagner's personal annotated copy of Morgan's *The Small Community*, another frequent reference.

³²Bauer, *Modern Housing*, 166, 178–80, plates 1, 25–6; Wright, *Rehousing Urban America*, 91–4.

³³See e.g. Walker, *Urban Blight and Slums*; National Resources Committee, *Our Cities*, 75–6; US Housing Act 1937, Sec. 10(a), 11(a).

³⁴*The Architectural Forum*, "Building's Postwar Pattern"; Urban Land Institute, *A Proposal*.

³⁵Urban Land Institute, *Decentralization*.

³⁶Urban Land Institute, *A Proposal*; National Resources Planning Board, *National Resources Development*, 13, 66–73.

community building³⁷ in large-scale rehabilitation initiatives, in turn framed in comprehensive metropolitan plans and broader strategies of regional restructuring connected to the creation of employment.³⁸ Wagner maintained a well-informed, critical engagement with many of these schemes, using them as catalysts, illustrations, or references in the projects with students, but also suggesting amendments, if not openly decrying them.

Within this debate, he showed special interest for the work of Guy E. Greer – a member of the Federal Reserve Board – and Alvin H. Hansen – an economist and colleague at Harvard – who prepared reports for the Urban Land Institute, drafted bills, and strived to disseminate their initiatives to broad audiences during this period.³⁹ These contributions stood out for their overt Keynesian orientation, ambition, and synthetic character, which considered city rebuilding as a new national frontier. Greer and Hansen urged a mixed programme of public planning and land acquisition, together with federal incentives to private construction of low-rent housing, conforming to a long-term master plan for entire metropolitan areas, ‘so organized as to permit great flexibility’.⁴⁰ Economic aspects were central to the proposal, which attracted Wagner’s attention.⁴¹ Their ideas were discussed at the GSD, in a time when the institution was redefining the planning curriculum.⁴² Greer and Hansen’s suggestion to promote an ‘extensive training programme for city planners ... in connection with certain universities’⁴³ must have piqued the interest of Dean Joseph Hudnut, who subsequently worked with Hansen in the organization of the 1942 Harvard Conference on Urbanism. Under the title ‘The Problem of the Cities and Towns’, it gathered representatives from the Federal Housing Administration, the National Resources Planning Board, and the Urban Land Institute, amongst others. Gropius and Wagner were also members of the organization committee and prepared the epilogue for the conference proceedings – edited by Greer – in terms ostensibly close to Hansen and Greer’s formulation, but projecting it in a more precise spatial and managerial scheme, in accordance with the work they were already developing with students.⁴⁴

Contouring the urban shape of capital: the work with students at Harvard

Wagner’s arrival at the School of Design can be inscribed in a broader strategy to provide the recently incorporated Department of Regional Planning with authoritative figures from the field of design, at a moment when Hudnut was trying to create a common ground with the programmes of Architecture and Landscape Architecture. As of 1941 the three departments participated in a number of exploratory incursions intended to produce a combined response to urban and housing problems. Wagner was the main party from the Department of Planning.⁴⁵ The goal, in his and Gropius’ terms, was to employ students’ work as a prefiguration of the cities of tomorrow, ‘preced[ing] any legislative work’.⁴⁶

Several evidences suggest that fundamental aspects of the conception of these exercises must be attributed to our protagonist. Although early syllabi were sometimes signed by several faculty

³⁷Urban Land Institute, *Decentralization*, 5.

³⁸Ascher, *Better Cities*, 4–5; National Resources Planning Board, *National Resources Development*, 100–8.

³⁹See especially Greer, *Your City Tomorrow*; Greer and Hansen, *Urban Redevelopment and Housing*; Hansen and Greer, “Toward Full Use.”

⁴⁰Greer and Hansen, *Urban Redevelopment and Housing*, 1; Greer, *The Problem*, 63–7.

⁴¹Letter of John Gaus to Joseph Hudnut, quoted in Vallye, “Design and the Politics,” 188.

⁴²Vallye, *ibid.*, 174; Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism*, 172.

⁴³Greer and Hansen, *Urban Redevelopment and Housing*, 19.

⁴⁴Gropius and Wagner, “Epilogue.”

⁴⁵Alofsin, *The Struggle for Modernism*, 172, 174; Gropius and Wagner, “A Program,” 75; Wagner, *Townlets and Towns*, 1.

⁴⁶Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*, 57.

members, most of the drafts can be found in Wagner's personal papers. The documents incorporate ideas and notions that were common in Wagner's writings from the first half of the 1930s, often using literal translations.⁴⁷ In the second half of the 1940s, Wagner worked solo in studios and seminars that prolonged these approaches, or appeared as the only author of assignments and syllabi when other colleagues participated. During this period Gropius – his most frequent ally until their breakup in 1947–1948 – gradually distanced himself from planning problems as he became more focused on his architectural practice at The Architects Collaborative, while Wagner – one of the few involved faculty members exclusively dedicated to academic work – developed previous experiences, sticking to the same lines and deepening their political-economic substrate with profuse publications until his death in 1957.

Through the assignments and the texts related to them we can reconstitute a synthetic project of regional rehabilitation that includes both the rebuilding of cities as service and command centres, and the suburbanization of production and everyday social reproduction processes. Although Wagner sometimes used the term 'rehabilitation' as a synonym for 'reconstruction' or 'rebuilding', the most elaborate and consistent formulation utilized the latter to designate the substitution of the old fabric with a new one that preserved the erstwhile urban structure and land use pattern. 'Rehabilitation', on the contrary, referred to a more thorough regeneration effort, with a comprehensive relocation of activities.⁴⁸ Wagner explicitly presented this strategy as an instrumental solution for the dilemma of postwar full employment.⁴⁹ Although of course he was not alone in envisioning such a Keynesian spatial fix for this problem,⁵⁰ his proposals provided an unusual mediation between the sphere of design and the political economy and managerial architecture supporting it. In order to secure their feasibility Wagner imposed himself and his students the intellectual imperative of thinking *with* capital, instead of against or without regard to it, a mistake he was always ready to criticize.⁵¹ Planners ought to 'turn their backs on all blue-sky-planning and designing methods that are not rooted in social and economic facts', embracing the paradox that 'only the most ideal and most economical ... solution will turn out to be the most practical and most valuable'.⁵²

Consequently, Wagner's vision of spatial restructuring was grounded in an analysis of urban, regional, and national economies, which he framed as a set of relations between 'inter-dependent economic units', perpetually rivalling to attract capital and to generate value.⁵³ In continuity with his above-mentioned 1929 intervention, he saw capital as a substance flowing through the built environment, distributed according to the capacity and efficacy of each unit's infrastructural fabric to anchor it in the form of investment or consumption.⁵⁴ The destruction of employment during the Great Depression was linked to the obsolescence of fixed capital, the decentralization of population and economic activity, and real-estate depreciation, which were in turn understood as symptoms of a terminal stage in the spatial cycle of capital, the 'disease' of 'dying metropolises'.⁵⁵ More generally, industrial and residential slums, agricultural blight, ghost towns, and depressed regions were seen as epiphenomena of a single trend of capitalist uneven spatial development at different

⁴⁷For example, the concepts of '*Stadtschaft*'/'township', '*Nachbarschaft*'/'neighborship' or '*Nahrungsraum*'/'space of nourishment'.

⁴⁸Wagner, *The Balance Sheet*, 15.

⁴⁹Wagner, *City Rehabilitation*, 52–3.

⁵⁰The most obvious example is perhaps R. G. Tugwell's vision for the Greenbelt Towns programme as a two-tier model of inner city densification and suburban resettlement.

⁵¹See Wagner, *New Town Economy*, 37–8; 'Städtebau im Kostenspiegel'; "Die Vermögensbilanz der Stadt"; and, especially, *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 55–66.

⁵²Gropius et al., *Housing Problem 1941*, 5.

⁵³Wagner, *City Rehabilitation*, 61–2; "Unwirtschaftlichkeit der Millionenstädte," 284.

⁵⁴Wagner, *New Town Economy*, 37–8; Gropius and Wagner, *Housing as a Townbuilding*, 8–9.

⁵⁵Wagner and Gropius, "Cities' Renaissance," 12; Wagner, "Bauen für die Massen."

scales.⁵⁶ According to Wagner, this spontaneous tendency of capital to polarize ‘high- and low-pressure areas of economic power’ was per se unsustainable and could lead to ‘the most violent outbreak of social forces’,⁵⁷ but existing forms of ‘dis-planning’⁵⁸ aggravated the conflicts due to their incapacity to identify and tackle the problem of urban and regional obsolescence with an integral perspective.⁵⁹ He would soon take these ruminations about the corrosion of urbanity and the need for a total rehabilitation programme beyond the American context, equating the predicament of cities slowly eroded by capital drain with sudden urban destruction in the wake of aerial warfare in Europe.⁶⁰

However, Wagner embedded city centre rehabilitation within a broader regional-metropolitan urbanization model, suggesting a preliminary comprehensive reorganization of hinterlands as mixed industrial-agricultural spaces that would absorb surplus metropolitan populations while remaining closely imbricated not only with each other but also with the regional core.⁶¹ The arrangement resonates with the gradual blurring of the traditional city/country divide at that time: ‘the term “town” has ceased to mean a local autonomous administration unit, but is related to a new integrated administration system covering a whole region in which a “township” would be the lowest sub-section of this organization’, ‘a new type of ... settlement which is part of a new country-town in a new “town-country”’.⁶² The townships not only aimed at satisfying ‘the longings and cravings of [Oil Age’s] souls’ in their ‘flight from the city’⁶³ but, more importantly, were devised to liberate metropolises of their greatest burden: obsolete economic activities and their associated unemployed, dependent populations,⁶⁴ which increased public assistance expenditure, fiscal pressure, and hence incentivized further decentralization of activities and affluent families.⁶⁵ In parallel with population resettlement, there was a gradual relocation of economic activities ‘which [were] already overtaken by the law of diminishing returns’, before they were ‘overcome by premature obsolescence’.⁶⁶ Liberated land in old city centres should be acquired simultaneously. The physical rehabilitation of the regional core would be ‘the last act of the long process of city reconstruction’.⁶⁷

Restructuring metropolitan hinterlands

Townships, the ‘self-contained town-cells’ of the new urban system, were communities of around 5000 inhabitants, conceived according to neighbourhood unit principles, where ‘people live[d] within walking distance of their working places, shops, schools, churches, and community

⁵⁶Gropius and Wagner, *Housing as a Townbuilding*, 12–3; Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*, 64.

⁵⁷Wagner, *City Rehabilitation*, 48.

⁵⁸Wagner’s letter to Gov. Ch. Herter, MWP folder 12/27, March 14, 1954.

⁵⁹Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*, 64.

⁶⁰Wagner, “Der Neubau der City,” 130.

⁶¹Wagner, *Townlets and Towns*, 67; *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 82.

⁶²Gropius and Wagner, *Housing as a Townbuilding*, 21; Wagner and Gropius, “*Cities’ Renaissance*,” 30–1. Wagner used a similar notion in 1934 (Wagner, *Die neue Stadt*, 18–24). Gropius and Wagner also referred to ‘garden-cities embedded in regional city-gardens’ and to ‘country-cities in city-countries’ (Gropius et al., *Housing Problem*, 11; Gropius and Wagner, “*Epilogue*,” 102; “*A Program*,” 75). Wagner subsequently elaborated a more complex concept of ‘an organic group of garden-cities (*Gartenstädten*) in city-landscapes (*Stadt-Landschaften*), ie. in units where town-scapes (*Stadtschaften*), forest-scapes (*Waldschaften*) and country-scapes (*Feldschaften*) penetrate and mingle with each other’ (Wagner, *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 19).

⁶³Wagner and Gropius, “*Cities’ Renaissance*,” 13.

⁶⁴Gropius and Wagner, “*Epilogue*,” 101.

⁶⁵Gropius and Wagner, *Housing as a Townbuilding*, 16.

⁶⁶Wagner and Gropius, “*Cities’ Renaissance*,” 23. The frequent use of a political-economic repertoire, from the classical economists to Marx, is another evidence of Wagner’s principal authorship in the texts signed with Gropius, who rarely resorts to such jargon in his solo writings.

⁶⁷Gropius and Wagner, “*A Program*,” 86.

center'.⁶⁸ The working class amounted to 75% of the entire population, occupied in the three to five local factories in short working days that guaranteed three daily shifts and full employment.⁶⁹ The housing density was very low, between four and eight families per acre, mostly in single-family dwellings.⁷⁰ In 1941 and 1942, the township still appeared as an isolated, simple unit without disaggregation into smaller design cells, but from 1946 on each township was composed of 5–6 lower-scale 'townlets' or 'neighbourships' and was in turn combined with 4–5 other townships in order to create a larger entity, the town–country–town (*Stadt–Land–Stadt*) of 25,000–30,000 inhabitants.⁷¹ These population thresholds had to be preserved in order to secure efficient community life; if a settlement reached its limits, a new township would be created.⁷²

All the township studios were located in the environs of Boston metropolitan area, about 20 miles from the city centre, the equivalent to a 20-minute commute via rapid transport systems.⁷³ The students' proposals were characterized by flowing geometries and the attempt to dilute the built fabric in the surrounding landscape.⁷⁴ Buildings receded into the background of design conception, reduced to generic figures due to the application of prefabrication techniques. The emphasis shifted towards a new urban form that proactively integrated the landscape architect as a fundamental agent, 'the first man [*sic*] to appear on the planning field'; landscape became 'an integral and organic part of the region' and 'penetrate[d] the various parts in and around the town'.⁷⁵ The results of 1941 and 1942 studios were first synthesized and published in an article in *The Architectural Forum*, with a solution that rescaled Wagner's early diagrams of city-wide systems of park wedges in his doctoral thesis (Figure 2(a,b)).⁷⁶ Cul-de-sac streets alternated with green paths which connected the township centre with surrounding agricultural and forest areas, fragmenting and isolating a basic 'cellular social structure' that Wagner would later call 'block-community', constituted by a residential group with its own nursery.⁷⁷ Re-elaborating the Radburn pattern, a double system of pedestrian alleys and roadways formed a loose U-shaped network of a half-mile radius around the community centre, which included a shopping area and hotel, recreational and sport facilities, elementary and high schools, administrative services, and parking space.⁷⁸ This community-form echoed a range of earlier references, from the obvious cases of Greenbelt, Maryland and Greenhills, Ohio, to the figuration of well-contoured gathering spaces that Wagner himself had already explored with Bruno Taut, at a different scale, in Berlin-Britz's central building and garden. Later exercises preserved the essential land use structure, but also substantially complicated the formal scheme with more variegated and informal layouts (Figure 3(a–c)).⁷⁹

⁶⁸Wagner and Gropius, "Cities' Renaissance," 17. Small variations in population size are introduced in other contributions e.g. see Gropius and Wagner, "A Program," 79. The parallels with Perry's neighbourhood unit concept are numerous, but also the differences, especially in relation to the presence of economic activities.

⁶⁹Gropius et al., Housing Problem, 10; Gropius and Wagner, "A Program," 30; Wagner, City Rehabilitation, 50–1, 175.

⁷⁰Gropius and Wagner, "A Program," 80; Wagner, "Die Stadtschaft," 192; *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 24.

⁷¹Wagner, Townlets and Towns, 73–4; "Die Stadtschaft," 193; *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 36–7, 39. It would be interesting to conduct a more detailed analysis of the parallels with the structure of the British New Towns, launched immediately after the 1946 studio.

⁷²Wagner, Townlets and Towns, 73–4.

⁷³See e.g. Gropius et al., Housing Problem, 8–9.

⁷⁴Initially justified as a way to camouflage settlements in case of air raids, in line with contemporary landscape experiments. Dümpele-mann, *Flights of Imagination*, 172–83, describes how aircraft warfare and aviation more generally eased the penetration of strategic landscape design principles in urban interventions. For Wagner and Gropius, 'towns ... [would] have to be shaped also in respect to the bird's eye view' in the context of a proliferation of air transport; Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*, appendix 12.

⁷⁵Gropius and Wagner, Housing as a Townbuilding, 45; see also Gropius et al., Housing Problem, 13; Wagner, "Die Stadtschaft," 195.

⁷⁶Gropius and Wagner, "A Program"; Wagner, "Das sanitäre Grün."

⁷⁷Wagner, Townlets and Towns, 84.

⁷⁸Gropius and Wagner, "A Program," 80, 82.

⁷⁹Wagner, "Die Stadtschaft," 194.

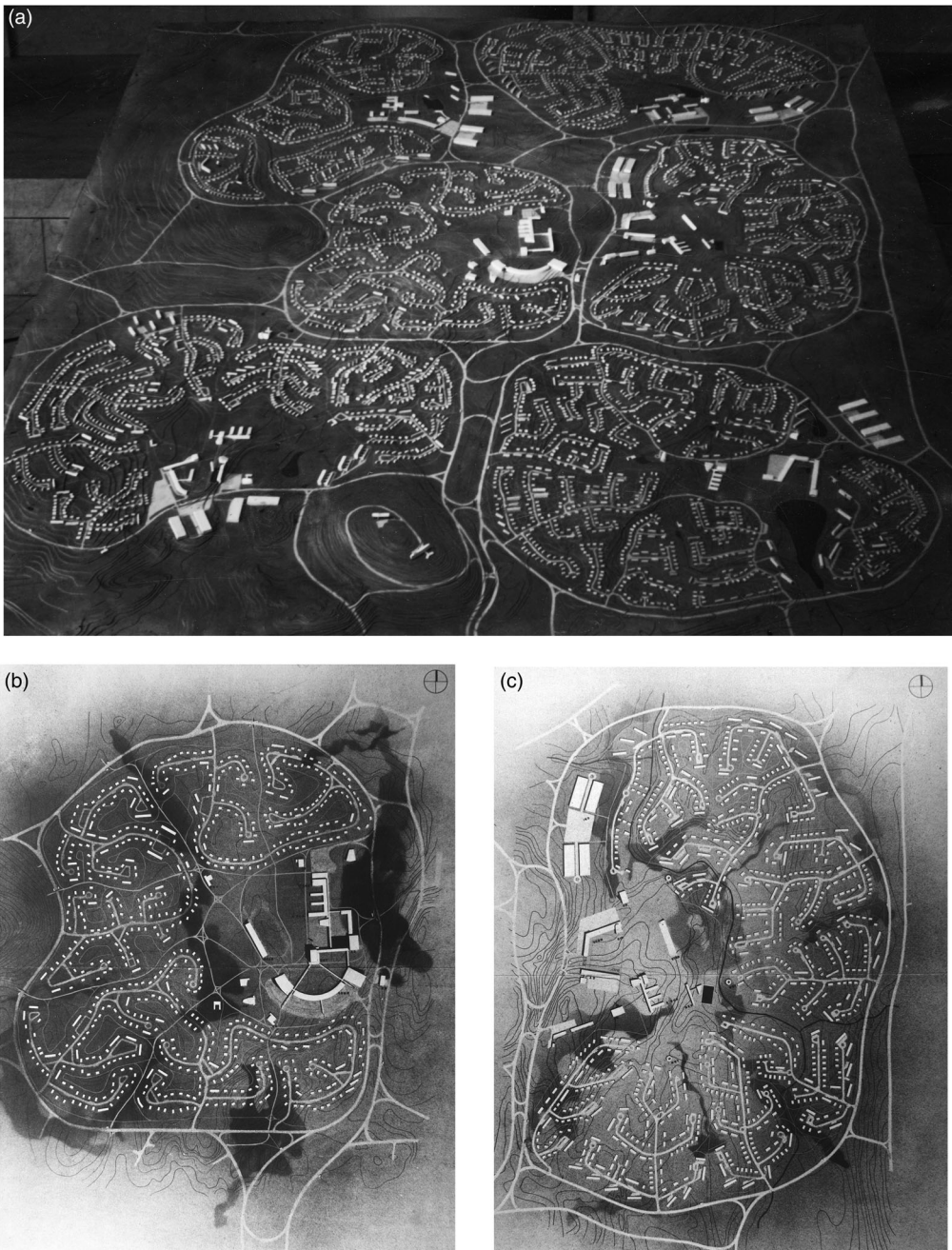


Figure 3. The 1946 studio proposes the combination of six townships to create a ‘town–country–town’ of 25,000–30,000 inhabitants. The layout is looser and more variegated than was the case in previous schemes. Sources: (a) Martin Wagner Papers, folder 57. (b and c) Collection of photostated plates showing work of students, NA2300.H37-W342x. Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University.

Light industry, connected to the railway and with independent road access, was also integrated in the design, close to the community centre.⁸⁰ Finally, the townships contributed to enhance ‘the open country as promoter of agriculture, forestry and recreation’,⁸¹ another element from the garden-city tradition that Wagner had already utilized in his German experience.⁸² The proposals reserved approximately 50% of the available land for the creation of ‘spaces of nourishment’, which provided further employment opportunities and local production of everyday goods for the settlement’s population and industry. Farms would use townships’ waste and sewage water to increase soil fertility which, together with reduced distribution costs, would secure higher revenues for farmers, helping to revive the primary sector in the vicinities of metropolitan areas.⁸³

Rent gaps and displacement in the new regional core

Back in the city, the overall regional concept presented its most pernicious aspects. The massive displacement of working-class populations to the suburbs was the correlate of a social and functional cleansing of the city core, with the subsequent loss of centrality for popular strata. It is intriguing – and sad, given Wagner’s political past – that our protagonist played a prominent role in inoculating students with this idea, in a manifest example of the detachment of contemporary ‘progressive’ architectural ideologies from actually existing working-class communities, despite their rhetorical aspiration to forge a new urban pattern ‘for the people and by the people’.⁸⁴ Wagner taught several seminars and studios taking Boston centre as a field of operations and published extensively on the topic, using students’ work as illustration, especially in the context of postwar German reconstruction. He would even present the early results of this collective inquiry as an entry in the 1944 Boston Contest, which had invited the submission of comprehensive planning ideas for the metropolitan area. Although he cautioned that the schemes were only preliminary ‘diagrams’, not actual implementation projects, the proposal was ignored due to its radicalism.⁸⁵

Wagner, who had harshly criticized the financial naiveté of Le Corbusier’s Plan Voisin, considered the integral replacement of urban centres not a whimsical excess of design illuminates, but a historical regularity and, above all, an economic imperative. According to him conservatives did not bear in mind that ‘urban nuclei ... have torn down their old bodies three or four times in the past’.⁸⁶ He noted that subsequent economic cycles and the logic of capital accelerated this process, demanding iterative renovations every 25–30 years. Planners had to articulate this process in pursuit of the ‘general’ interest, imposing compulsory amortization periods on real-estate investments, and hence turning finance and fiscal measures into design instruments.⁸⁷ As we have seen, the concept of a short-life city, functional to the needs of a single generation, had been devised in Berlin in connection to his analysis of the implications of central public space renovation and real-estate investment patterns.⁸⁸

⁸⁰Gropius and Wagner, *Housing as a Townbuilding*, 27–8.

⁸¹Gropius and Wagner, “A Program,” 79.

⁸²Wagner, “American Versus German City,” 334; *Die neue Stadt*, 16, 19, 23.

⁸³Wagner, *Townlets and Towns*, 72; “American Versus German City,” 335.

⁸⁴Gropius and Wagner, “Epilogue.” Gropius participates only in one of the seminars focused on city centre renovation; see Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*.

⁸⁵Wagner, *The Boston Contest*; Diefendorf, “The Boston Contest: Introduction,” xv–xvi; Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*, appendix 12.

⁸⁶Wagner, *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 82.

⁸⁷Wagner and Gropius, “Cities’ Renaissance,” 27–8; Wagner, *City Rehabilitation*, 86–91; *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 54. Compulsory amortization was increasingly seen by American judges as a legal precondition of contemporary zoning ordinances in order to deal with non-conforming land uses. Wagner had advocated this kind of approach already in Germany; see Wagner, “Städtebauliche Probleme der Großstadt,” 104.

⁸⁸Wagner, “Städtebauliche Probleme der Großstadt”; see also Scarpa, *Martin Wagner e Berlino*, 108.

The initiatives of Alexanderplatz and Potsdamer Platz were also related to a darker aspect that reappears in a more virulent fashion at Harvard: the razing of slums and associated mass eviction.⁸⁹ The reasons had not changed. In 1932, Wagner had stated: 'Why ... do we maintain millions of citizens in ... places that are incontestably dead? And how long are we going to permit this popular-economic crime?'⁹⁰ In the US, he would openly attack not only the 'pestering slums which threaten to rot in the cities' very core what is still vital and worthy of conservation or rejuvenescence' but also contemporary public housing policies,⁹¹ identifying both as the main factor in municipal bankruptcy:⁹² 'I think our past housing was ... a complete failure ... a wishy-washy policy that tried to ignore the whole capitalistic basis of our economics and to switch some kind of socialism into its cog-wheels'.⁹³ Although slum clearance was a consensual procedure at that time, Wagner was poignantly prophetic by suggesting

the use of slum land for highly profitable business purposes or for rehousing parts of the higher income classes ... City-center land has today no greater nor more urgent need than to be buttressed by the purchasing power of the richer income classes.⁹⁴

The idea presaged subsequent urban renewal steps, particularly in Boston.

For Wagner, slums comprised not only residential neighbourhoods but also obsolete commercial and productive activities and those incoherent with the economically conspicuous condition of the metropolitan core.⁹⁵ Industry, small retail and working-class housing were second-rate activities, improper for such places. They belonged in the suburbs, in contact with nature and wide open space. In the big city they were only 'pathological foci' which deserved to be deprived of any type of incentive until they languished and died,⁹⁶ particularly in relation to working-class areas by 'cutting off public services which do not pay (as every private corporation would do!)'.⁹⁷ Vast department store complexes had to be erected in their place, together with banks and office buildings, governmental headquarters and cultural venues, luxury hotels and high-end housing.⁹⁸ Using an argument that anticipates neoliberal articulations of urban cosmopolitanism, Wagner suggested that in order to entice investment capital into these enclaves it was necessary to anchor not only the consumption power of local elites and suburban masses, but also that of the international bourgeoisie: planners had to reserve the main commercial, cultural, and political attractions for the regional core.⁹⁹ The motivations for this drastic solution were, again, cruelly economic: according to Wagner, sweeping rehabilitation was only feasible through the concentration of top-end services that 'pay the highest rentals'¹⁰⁰ and hence generated rent gaps that made the transformation desirable for owners and financial agencies – in this perspective, the city crown became a pure space of cosmopolitan consumption, spectacle, and corporate command.

⁸⁹Wagner, "Die Sanierung."

⁹⁰Wagner, "Sterbende Städte?" 56.

⁹¹Wagner, *City Rehabilitation*, 68, 208–9.

⁹²Wagner, "Unwirtschaftlichkeit der Millionenstädte," 283.

⁹³Letter to W. Wurster, quoted in Oberlander, *Houser*, 212.

⁹⁴Wagner, *City Rehabilitation*, 217–9, 221.

⁹⁵Wagner, "Der Neubau der City," 130, 136.

⁹⁶Wagner, *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 93.

⁹⁷Wagner, *New Town Economy*, 39–40.

⁹⁸Wagner and Gropius, "Cities' Renaissance," 31; *The New Boston Center*, 34–6; Wagner, *City Rehabilitation*, 181–2.

⁹⁹Wagner, "Vernunft-Perspektiven im Städtebau," 143; "Bauen für die Massen," 272.

¹⁰⁰Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*, 35.

Wagner synthesized this approach to land use distribution in his theory of ‘crop rotation’, another by-product of the mandate to mobilize planning to energize capital circulation through the built environment so as to prevent urban decay:

City rehabilitation can never be done for the same use in the same spot. The various income classes of each city migrate from section to section according to increasing or decreasing income, or family changes, or building obsolescence, and so on. Therefore the planners will have to change the ‘crop’ if they want to rehabilitate a city section profitably.¹⁰¹

In that sense, prolonging Berlin intuitions, he advocated the need to get rid of traditional zoning ordinances that rigidified land use patterns.¹⁰²

These principles of rehabilitation were materialized in concrete proposals for the first time in a 1942 seminar developed in cooperation with Gropius (Figure 4(a–c)). Students were asked to free Boston’s centre from any ‘undesirable’ activity in order to render the peninsula a potent attractor of suburban purchasing power.¹⁰³ Wagner must have monitored the result closely – he signed the drawings annexed to the course description, which later became the basis for his neglected Boston Contest entry¹⁰⁴ and the above-mentioned *Popular Science* piece, both from 1944. A far-fetched, arc-shaped megastructure occupied by department stores extends over a devastated Boston, embracing a gigantic park. The East–West axis incorporates stiff symmetrical buildings and facilities, including a motorboat port, railway and bus terminals, and the mammoth exhibition and government centres. About half of the peninsula is filled with underground parking areas incorporating 12 times the existing lots.¹⁰⁵ The low-rise commercial edifice is interrupted by fourteen 20-story slab buildings, flanked by an outer ring of hotels and clubs and an inner ring of recreational spaces.

Compared with this arrangement, a subsequent studio work that Wagner published in 1948 was slightly more moderate, for it considered the preservation of the Beacon Hill neighbourhood and singular historical buildings, which remained isolated and exposed in a *tapis vert* (Figure 5(a–c)).¹⁰⁶ This second approach was formally more elaborate but also colossal, concentrating a fourth of the preexisting built area in a single architectural gesture.¹⁰⁷ The grand structure was fragmented in five ‘economic-units’ articulated to underground stations and composed, again, of department stores, an office building, leisure facilities, and large parking areas. These five units, situated in the lowest-priced areas around the water front and hence easier to ‘liberate’ through demolition, should be enough to relocate deserving economic activities, proceeding afterwards to substitute the remaining urban fabric with a continuous park dotted with cultural and recreational buildings, hotels, and high-rent housing.¹⁰⁸

Private capital as city builder

The managerial and financial model proposed to carry out these initiatives is revealing of Wagner’s ideological *dérive*. Both in new townships and in city-core interventions he initially put forward combined strategies by public–private partnerships, using independent agencies as mediators, direct managers, or guarantors of processes of planning, land acquisition, relocation of activities, and

¹⁰¹Wagner, *The Balance Sheet*, 14.

¹⁰²Wagner, *New Town Economy*, 33.

¹⁰³Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*, 14–18.

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*, appendix; Wagner, *The Boston Contest*; Diefendorf, “Introduction: The Boston Contest,” xv.

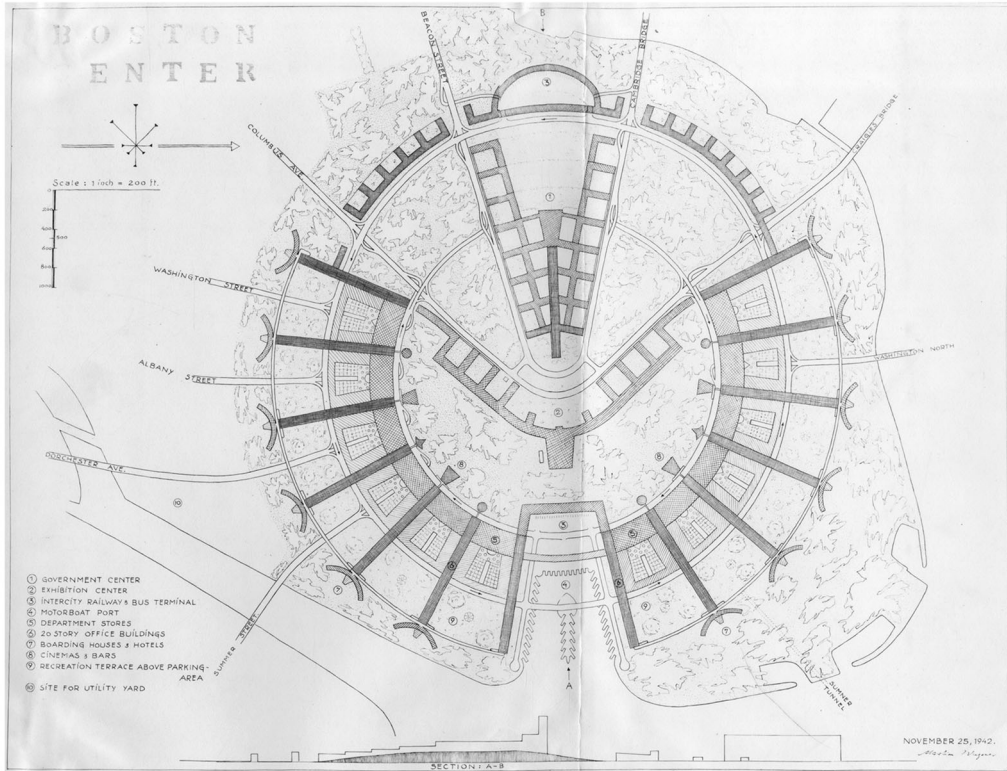
¹⁰⁵Wagner and Gropius, *The New Boston Center*, 16–18.

¹⁰⁶Wagner, “Der Neubau der City.”

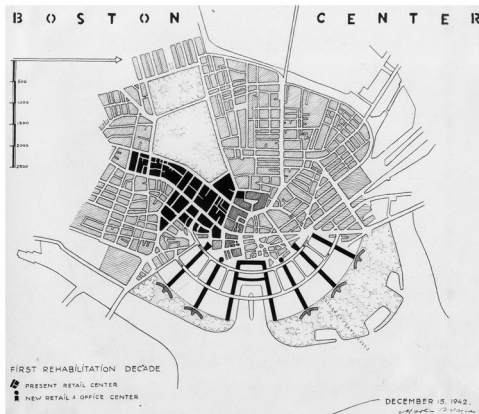
¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 136.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, 129.

(a)



(b)



(c)

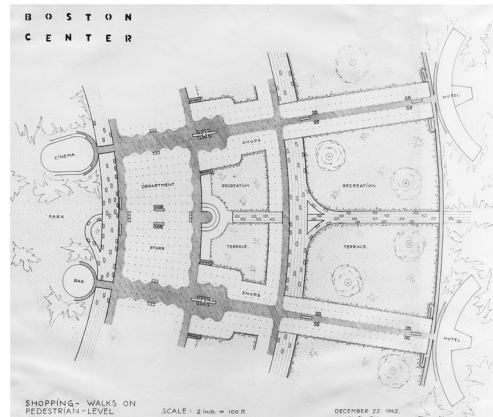


Figure 4. Martin Wagner's personal drawings for the 1942 studio 'The New Boston Center', later used as the basis for his entry in the 1944 Boston Contest. (a) General layout, (b) arrangement for the first stage of rehabilitation, and (c) detail of the main department store-office building. Source: Wagner and Gropius, "The New Boston Center," appendix. Courtesy of the Frances Loeb Library, Harvard University.

building that still kept an indelible state imprint.¹⁰⁹ However, Wagner would gradually shift towards an alternative perspective that privileged the leadership of private enterprise, especially in city rehabilitation interventions. In this scheme, the public administration participates in the process as just

¹⁰⁹E.g. see Gropius and Wagner, "A Program," 27–8.

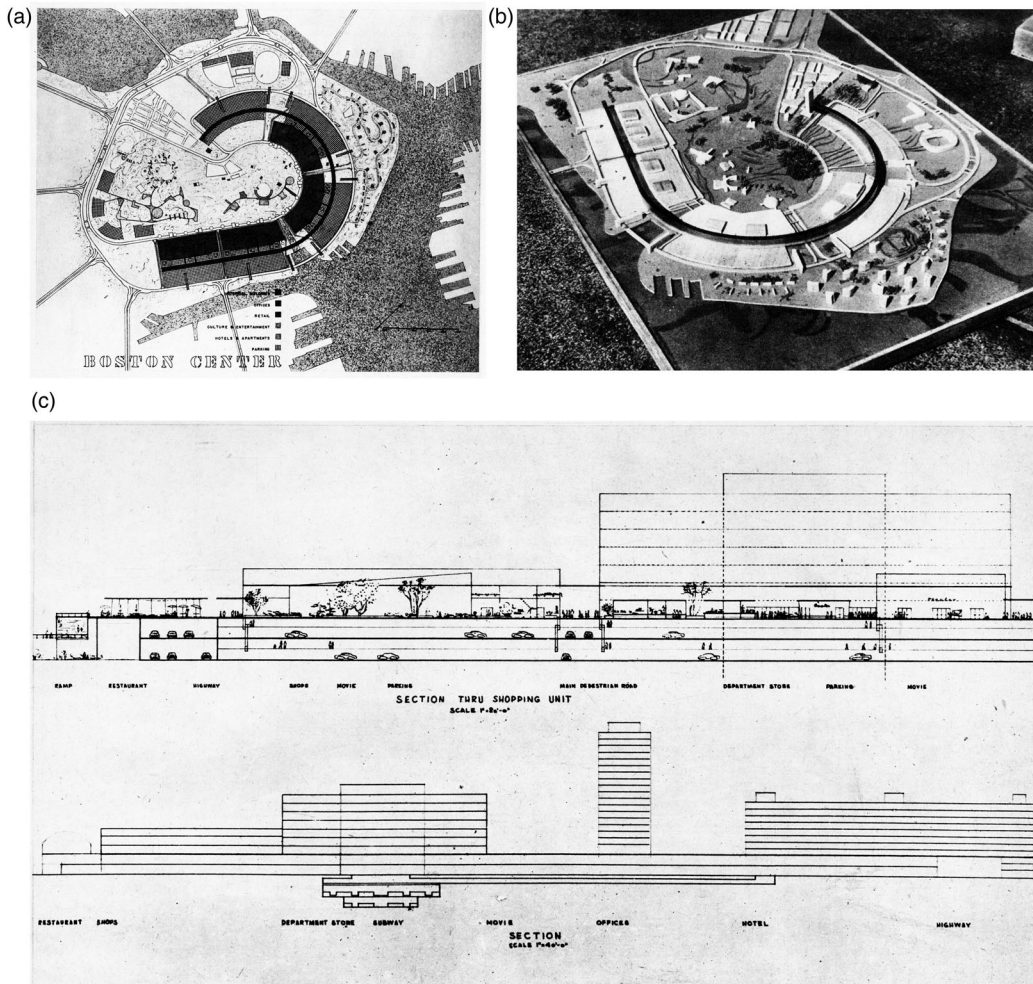


Figure 5. The students' second proposal for the rehabilitation of Boston centre, as published in 1948. (a, b) General layout and model and (c) section through one of the building units. Source: Wagner, "Der Neubau der City," 129, 133, 135.

another landowner, contributing its 'assets' to a property pool that Wagner problematically identified as 'communal' or social capital.¹¹⁰ These real-estate conglomerates would work as limited dividend corporations in which each owner held a share in accordance with the percentage of contributed land, proceeding as private companies and hence prioritizing profit maximization and viability.¹¹¹

Once more this was the end point of a dialectic opened in Germany. There he had encouraged the adoption of entrepreneurial management approaches as a housing advisor for trade unions and during his participation in diverse local planning offices, and, simultaneously, had pushed for a socialization of investment and real-estate capital.¹¹² For a few years, the Keynesian

¹¹⁰Wagner, "Der Neubau der City," 136; *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*, 62–4, 85–6, 96–7, 167–8.

¹¹¹Wagner, *Townlets and Towns*, 20.

¹¹²Scarpa, *Martin Wagner e Berlino*, 11, 17, 19, 58.

perspectives of the late New Deal tempered Wagner's earlier mistrust of state capacity to trigger profound urban change, acquired after his flawed *Stadtbaurat* experience. However, the reproduction of traditional approaches and institutional inattention to his ideas would soon revive his critique of mainstream planning and the limits of municipal action within inherited managerial, political-economic and design frameworks. The result, as we have seen, was a deepened and contradictory attempt to explore the reach of organized capital as a potential guarantor of radical metropolitan transformation.

Conclusion: final years and afterlife

In his last years, Wagner maintained this latter approach.¹¹³ In 1950, he retired as professor emeritus, combining a reduced presence at the GSD with copious writings – including his 1951 book *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau* – entries for competitions and proposals derived from earlier experiments, which he submitted to public officials and entrepreneurs.¹¹⁴ Only vague responses were delivered to his residence in 33 Bowdoin St, Cambridge, promises that never materialized. The impetus of his pugnacious rhetoric must have struck addressees as Quixotic, extravagantly literate but strangely detached from the orthodoxy of postwar Fordist arrangements. None of his American proposals were implemented and many of the documents discussed above remain unpublished or untranslated. Wagner's frustration with conventional policy – which was in any case already present in Berlin – and the tepid reception his ideas received may have led him to develop the speculative reach thereof. Ironically, this allowed him to anticipate major urban shifts of subsequent decades: ongoing suburban flight and the hatching of the British New-Town programme; urban renewal campaigns, the celebration of rent gaps, and the onset of gentrification; and, more importantly, the cold edge of entrepreneurial, neoliberal urbanism with its recipe of locational competition, fiscal balance, regressive redistribution, and profit-oriented class revanchism. Wagner did not have a direct influence on these processes, of course. His American work operates rather as a crude albeit consistent index of the potential reach of a stark capitalist approach to urban restructuring, a clear-cut illustration of how 'progressive' architectural ideologies – blind per se as a result of their indifference to popular conceptions of the world, but perhaps more alienated in Wagner's case due to his uprooted condition – can mistake functional efficacy and financial feasibility for the people's welfare.

Wagner's legacy, however, may well go beyond his theoretical production, given his magnetic impact on students that admired his uncompromising attitude. Many of them would become prominent practitioners and scholars afterwards, including William Conklin, designer of the pioneering new town of Reston, Virginia, and member of the 1966 renewal plan for Lower Manhattan; Robert L. Geddes, professor at Penn's Graduate School of Fine Arts and Dean of the Princeton School of Architecture; Blanche Lemco van Ginkel, professor at Penn, Montreal and McGill, and Dean of Toronto's School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture; Macklin Hancock, designer of the first major designed new town in Canada, Don Mills, Toronto and frequent contributor on the topics of shopping centres and suburban town centres; Martin Meyerson, professor at University of Chicago, the Harvard GSD and University of Pennsylvania, founder and director of the MIT–Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies, and Dean of the College of Environmental Design, University of

¹¹³See Wagner, "Die Vermögensbilanz der Stadt"; "Städtebau im Kostenspiegel"; "Vernunft-Perspektiven im Städtebau"; *Wirtschaftlicher Städtebau*; "Bauen für die Massen"; "Unwirtschaftlichkeit der Millionenstädte."

¹¹⁴See e.g. letters to managers of General Motors and the Republic Steel Co., MWP folder 7; letters to Massachusetts Governor Ch. Herter, the Commissioner of the Department of Commerce and the Boston Citizens Council's Director, MWP folder 12; entry for the 1953 General Motors Highway Contest, MWP folder 24.

California at Berkeley; Peter Oberlander, who came to the GSD attracted by Wagner and launched the first Canadian programme in Community and Regional Planning at University of British Columbia, later becoming the founding Director of its Center for Human Settlements; Vincent Ponte, champion of Montreal's urban renewal and father of its Underground City; David Wallace, professor at Penn, mastermind of Baltimore's Charles Center and Inner Harbor renewal campaigns and other major urban renewal plans across the US, and designer of Maryland's Plan for the Green Spring and Worthington Valleys with another illustrious Wagner student, Ian McHarg, who regarded Wallace as 'indisputably, the dominant city planner in the United States' by the 1970s;¹¹⁵ and William W. Wurster, future Dean of the School of Architecture at MIT. It would be interesting to trace the shadow of our protagonist in those initiatives which suggest a direct inspiration, such as Conklin's, Hancock's, Ponte's, or Wallace's, especially between the late 1950s and early 1970s, after Wagner's passing. Although he would have received these interventions with idiosyncratic sharp-edged criticism, they would no doubt have relieved his frustration with previous planning policy, as a late reminder that, against the consensual approaches of the 1940s, he was, after all, right about the fate of urbanization in a capitalist context.

In 1929, Wagner had affirmed that 'a community ... willing to survive'¹¹⁶ would not lament displacement, but be self-fulfilled through it. A few months after his death the trauma of eviction and uprootedness haunts Boston as the first West End tenements and later those around the popular Scollay Square start to fall, giving way not to social housing but, as he had envisioned, to upper-class apartments and the Government Center.¹¹⁷ Having imagined a new race of suburbanites regularly swarming into a mallified metropolitan core, Wagner would probably have scorned the mourning of one notable son of the city upon a hill who, at that time, contemplated the 'yellow dinosaur steam shovels ... gouge their underworld garage' near Boston Common, as a throng of 'giant finned cars' ran over the memories of his childhood.

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¹¹⁵McHarg, *A Quest for Life*, 213.

¹¹⁶Wagner, "Städtebauliche Probleme der Großstadt," 104.

¹¹⁷For a history of urban renewal in these enclaves, see O'Connor, *Building a New Boston*, 124–42.

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