

AICP STUDY GUIDE

Episode 24: We're Going Regional

And welcome to the 24th episode of The VERY UNofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast. I'm Jonathan Miller and thank you so much for joining.

Hopefully everyone got a decent break over the holiday weekend and maybe even got to break away some to enjoy some of the better weather? You deserve it for the hard work, but now it's back to the AICP cave. Anyways, as a friendly countdown reminder, April 30th is the rapidly approaching deadline for registering for the exam. With the exam window opening - well - the day after that. So, you have about 23 days - or 3 weeks - left.

Last week we talked about how zoning sort evolved out of avoiding nuisances in San Francisco to height restrictions in Massachusetts and D.C. to the actual creation of some basic land use zones in Los Angeles, up to the what's considered the very first zoning ordinance in the US: New York City's 1916 Zoning Ordinance.

This week though, we're pivoting away from zoning and into regional planning with the book 'Cities in Evolution', some of the first district commissions, and the first regional planning commission and plan.

If we're going to talk regional planning though, it makes sense to start with the Father of Regional Planning, Patrick Geddes.

(1:34)

Patrick Geddes (sorry, Sir Patrick Geddes) may have "town planner" or "pioneering planner" next to his name to describe what he's known for in some places, but he really was not a planner at all. Having never finished a college degree, Geddes somehow went on to teach Zoology at Edinburgh University, wrote a book called the Evolution of Sex, was the Chair of Botany at University College Dundee, and finally the Chair of Sociology at the University of Bombay in India. But, our renaissance man Geddes is also known in the world of planning. In fact, he's known as the Father of Regional Planning.

So, how did a guy who really considered himself a sociologist do that?

Well, we all know city / urban / regional / whatever - just planning - they all have a sociological component to it, and Sir Geddes was apparently pretty amazing at sociological observations in society. Geddes was of the mindset - shared by others by the way, but they aren't the focus here - that evolution, like in a biological sense, could be applied to society as well. Subsequently, he believed that planning was essentially the application of sociological principles to "man's interaction with the natural environment".

So, how does this play in to him being the Father of Regional Planning?

Well, He wrote - in 1915 - a little book called, "Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement".

This book - Cities in Evolution - is really the first instance of analyzing a region in terms of city, or in this case, town Planning. The term that Geddes used coined by Geddes is 'conurbation.' That's a legit word now. Until Geddes and regional planning it was not.

So what is conurbation? Conurbation - while super fun to say - is also a region that's made up of a bunch of cities, or basically multiple urban areas acting as a singular continuous developed area; or what we now call a metropolitan statistical area. I say we petition the Census to change MSA to 'conurbation.'

A great example he gives in the book is the conurbation of what he calls Lancastion, or the Lancashire area. So I'll read it off real quick:

"Here, far more than even Lancashire commonly realizes, is growing up again another Greater London as it were – a city-region of which Liverpool is the seaport and Manchester the market, now with its canal port also; while Oldham, and the many other factory towns, more accurately called "Factory districts," are the workshops. Even if this process be not in all respects so far advanced as in London, and as yet not organized in practice under any common government, is it not becoming fairly plain, a matter of reasonable foresight, that if growth and progress are to continue much longer as they have long been doing – in some respects of late faster than ever – the separate and detached towns, whose names we learned at school and still for local purposes employ, will become mainly of minor and district usefulness, postal and what not, like the practically unified cities and boroughs of London?"

At its most basic, Geddes pioneered the idea that planners should look at planning as a whole of the parts. If it functions as one, plan it as one. He was apparently super critical of planners that didn't think about their design with, 'the surrounding quarter and constructed without reference to local needs or potentialities.

This book is also responsible for describing the transition from a paleotechnic city, which is basically the industrial-era city, to a neotechnic city which is guided by science, but we'll leave that for another day. The other important take away from the book is what Geddes called the Valley section. You can google it for an image. Basically, it reads like the transect image, but instead runs from mountains to the lake / ocean / whatever, and instead of labelling each zone in terms of its - I don't know - urbanness is categorizes each area based on the typical work performed in that area: mining, hunting, farming, etc.

The idea here is that each segment works together to create a civilization, and civilization can't exist without the totality of the components. Or you can't look at a city in terms of the one neighborhood or one jurisdiction. You need to look at the totality of the parts - core business district, bedroom communities, industrial areas. They all work together.

So, what are some examples of planning in a regional context in the US?

(7:07)

First, we head back to Boston.

Remember our not-so-sanitary tenement housing and lack of a sewer system in New York? That happened between 1855 and 1901? Well, it was sort of common everywhere (it's just the time, you know). Anyway, Boston and the other closely developed towns and cities had the same issues with sewage running amuck, and the State legislature with the help of the Board of Health of course developed a report basically saying, 'This shit [pun intended] can't continue and we need sewers. But if this is going to work, we need a single, central agency doing the project because then they don't belong to one place, but all the places and will subsequently benefit all the places.'

And with that, we have the first regional authority, the Metropolitan Sewerage Board. Born in 1889.

(8:12)

Next, we'll head over to the Great State of Ohio. You think I wouldn't have to say this, but I lived in San Diego for about a year and Midwestern states are apparently very often confused. Ohio is the one south of Lake Erie. The one closer to the middle of the U.S. is Iowa, and the one near Washington state is Idaho. Lots of vowels. Trust me, I do get it.

Anyway, Dayton, Ohio (near the southwest corner of the state) is in the Great and Little Miami River Basin. As such, pretty prone to flooding.

On record are floods in 1814, 1828, 1832, 1847 (why are people still living here), 1866, 1883, 1897, and 1898. In 1913 though, a big one hit and killed over 300 people and mass amounts of damage.

So instead of moving, we stubborn humans said, 'I can fix this' and everyone in the area pooled their resources and formed the Miami Conservancy District in 1915. And in 1916, they made the first regional authority plan.

Together, they built 5 dry dams and 43 miles of levees and channel improvements . Basically something that only was able to be solved with a regional approach.

Back over in the northeast though, Boston would not be one up-ed by Dayton.

(9:55)

So back to Boston we go. Well, the Metropolitan Sewerage Board worked out pretty well. So well that the State legislature was like, 'we're going to do that shit again', and in 1893 they formed the Metropolitan Park Commission, and in 1895 they formed the Metropolitan Water Board. Not the illegal kind, cause that's just plain rude. I know, tasteless.

Sensing a little redundancy though, the Metropolitan Sewerage Board and Metropolitan Water Board combined because, well, that just plain makes sense. And in 1919, the Metropolitan Parks Commission joined the fun to create the super commission, the Boston Metropolitan District Commission.

(10:43)

New York though said, 'hold my beer.'

You see, New York is/was huge - like really huge - and after seeing Chicago execute a plan they realized they needed one. But, also realized they need a more comprehensive approach.

Charles Norton - part of the Chicago Plan - was appointed Chairman for the plan's advisory committee in 1914 and he even know that " No plan on New York will command recognition unless it includes all the area in which all New Yorkers earn their livelihood and make their homes. The plan ended up stalling out in the 19-teens, but in 1921 the Russell Sage foundation picked the project back up and created a committee.

Remember, this is the 1920's - the roaring 20's as they call them - so growth was very much occurring. There was an estimated 9 million people living in the metro area for example, and side note, this is also the golden age of the skyscraper. So, yeah, there's that.

So in 1922 they finally had their first meeting. I have to add this note though, the Regional Plan led by Thomas Adams wasn't completed until 1929. But any resource you find for the AICP exam says, 'inaugurated in 1922', So for our purposes, we care about when it was inaugurated. That's 1922, not completed (which would be in 1929), keep that in mind.

(12:41)

Over on the west coast though, Los Angeles said, 'we want in on this. Except wait, rewind for a brief build-up of Los Angeles.

Los Angeles - in Los Angeles County - is one of the largest counties in the US; geographically speaking. In 1852 when California became a state, they said to Los Angeles (and other general law and charter counties), 'No, your three-person Court of Sessions is no good. Instead, you get a five-person Board of Supervisors to govern your county.

So, fast forward to 1922 and the LA Board of Supervisors - or LA BS - said, 'We need to take some pressure off and we're growing, and we need to be planning more. So, lets be ahead of the curve. And in 1922, they formed the first governmental regional planning commission: the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission.

(13:52)

Time for the recap.

We went all regional today with the Father of Regional Planning - Patrick Geddes - and we talked about his book which really brought the concept of a regional approach to planning to the forefront: Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement.

And then really we just talked about some of the regional planning landmark events since at this time, cities in the US were growing enough that a regional approach was really sort of necessitated.

We hit the first regional authority in Boston's Metropolitan Sewerage Board in 1889, the formation of the Miami Conservancy District in Ohio and their regional plan in 1916, the formation of Boston's Metropolitan District Commission, New York City's Regional Plan Association and their first plan - the Regional Plan of New York (completed in 1929, but inaugurated in 1922), and the first official Regional Planning Commission in Los Angeles - also in 1922.

(15:10)

Well, thanks again for joining me! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me at theveryunofficialAICPGUIDE@gmail.com, and I'll do my best to help out if I can.

For those who tuned in last week, our question was, "Who wrote the 1916 New York Zoning Ordinance?"

And that would be our dear friend, the Father of Zoning, Edward Bassett.

If you want to play along this week, our question is, "What three regional authorities came together to create Boston's Metropolitan District Commission".

Anyways, don't forget to send in any encouraging audio messages to me and I'll be sure to include them. In the meantime though, feel free to subscribe to this podcast on whatever platform you use for podcasts and feel free to sign up on the show's website so you can follow along with future episodes, help prepare for the exam and supplement all of your other study regimens. And share this out with any planners you know, and don't forget to leave a review either.

Drop in next week when we hit a little miscellaneous episode. I've skipped over some events that just haven't fit in well with some of the other episodes, so we'll double back and get a little hodge podgey next week.

Thanks again everyone, 'till next time.

Links:

Cities in Evolution:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick_Geddes

<https://archive.org/details/citiesinevolutio00gedduoft/page/n17/mode/2up?ref=ol&view=theater>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conurbation>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290334248_Patrick_Geddes_and_cities_in_evolution_The_writing_and_the_readings_of_an_intempesteive_classic

Miami Conservancy District of Ohio:

<https://www.mcdwater.org/about-mcd-2/the-history-of-mcd/>

Boston Metropolitan District Commission:

[https://www.cityofboston.gov/images_documents/Metropolitan%20District%20Commission%20\(MDC\)%20Building%20Study%20Report_tcm3-17378.pdf](https://www.cityofboston.gov/images_documents/Metropolitan%20District%20Commission%20(MDC)%20Building%20Study%20Report_tcm3-17378.pdf)

Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission

<https://planning.lacounty.gov/about>

Regional Plan of New York and its Environs:

<https://rpa.org/work/reports/regional-plan-of-new-york-and-its-environs>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regional_Plan_Association