

# THINKING ABOUT REGIONAL PLANNING BASED ON THE STUDIES OF EBENEZER HOWARD, PATRICK GEDDES AND MILTON SANTOS

Cite

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**Abstract:** Urbanism, as an intellectual movement, born from the confrontation of the urban problems that have gained visibility from the Industrial Revolution, has had as main object models development, theories and solutions that would make conceptions of planned cities. In specific moments of this trajectory, certain characters plan not only to plan a city, but rather a set of cities, i.e., the region. The works of the planners Ebenezer Howard, Patrick Geddes and Le Corbusier, along with the 1933 Athens Charter have established theoretical and conceptual bases for regional planning. Otherwise, in the epistemology of Milton Santos there is the basis of the contemporary geography with a rich reflection on the space, the region and man's interaction with his environment. This article briefly aims to establish a link between these timeless works and contribute to the discussion on the future of regional planning.

**Keywords:** regional planning, contemporary geography, region, region-city

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## 1 Introduction

The connection between man and the dwelling place is the subject of extensive studies. Whether for practical or ideal questions, the way we occupy the space dictates the direction and pace of life in our community, and, therefore, we have our value, culture and symbolism systems. A reunion of people from the Industrial Revolution significantly changed the way this process had been happening, and has printed a new system of appropriation of space.

## 2 The concept of region according to Ebenezer Howard and Patrick Geddes' urbanism.

In some moments of human history certain characters looked at the society and to the cities they lived, studied their problems and sought to create new environmental concepts. The descriptions of these spaces would be identified by historiography as ideal cities, or as utopias.

According to Rosenau (1986, p.16), the descriptions of ideal cities or ideal drawings would express the aspirations of a given population, seeking an answer to temporal problems, challenging certain environmental conjunctures.

According to Chauí (2008, p. 01), the utopian narratives would be born as a literary genre that would describe happy and perfect societies that would live in fair cities. The word utopia, "no place" or "nowhere", was invented by Thomas Morus, to name his proposal for an ideal, fair, happy and collectivist society that would live on the Utopia Island.

It is interesting that, on the conception of this ideal society, Morus, in 1516, has presented a concern regarding the regional issue and the possibilities of integrating the set of ideal cities of that island.

According to Morus (1982, p. 36) on the Utopia island there would be 54 cities, large and magnificent, with laws and identical customs and similar tracings. The cities would be placed next to each other, at distances which would not be longer than approximately 3000 km.

In Amaurota description, the government headquarters, situated in an ideal central point of the island, Morus (1982, p.37) would try to describe the context of other 53 cities that would be similar. He would describe the city's relationship with the Anhydrous River, responsible for supplying, and yet the deep relationship of the islanders with agricultural activities.

According to Morus (1982, p.36) families would be engaged in agricultural activities rotatable, and they would return to town after two years of work in the field. The renewal of families would happen interspersed, annually, seeking to avoid inexperienced people to deal with agricultural activities, so, for Morus, people would not have to face for a long time what he would call "*the rude life on the field*" - except for those lovers who would receive permission to work on the land for longer.

In the description of that ideal island, Morus would also design an ideal society with a strong community and egalitarian spirit that would establish close links between country and city.

The country and city contradiction, allied with the development of a new cooperative society integrated to a region, would be overcoming 382 years after the publication of Utopia by Thomas Morus with theories of Ebenezer Howard to the Garden City.

Urbanism, as a critical discipline, reflective and purposeful, would be born from the confrontation of the cities' problems that were transformed by the industrial revolution. The European industrial cities of the nineteenth century, and particularly the British cities, conforming the cinematographic descriptions of Engels (2008) would reveal overcrowded cities, large and unhealthy. To this sick city, with poor housing conditions, circulation and sanitation, the urban planners would present proposals and solutions that were well described by Choay (1979) and Hall (1995), among other authors.

However, most of these proposals and solutions would aim at face the problems of a city and not of a set of cities, i.e., there is the planning of the city but rarely the planning of a region.

One of the main solutions considered by the planners to face the problems of the cities was by zoning, an instrument of legislative regulation that sought to organize the use and occupation of urban land.

According to Mancuso (1980, p.80) in Reinhard Baumeister's book, 1876: "Enlargement of Towns from the technical, local government, and economic points of view", would formulate the concept of zoning, recommending the separation of uses and urban activities.

The principles of zoning would be defined in the Charter of Athens, the resulting document of IV CIAM - International Congress of Modern Architecture, 1933. The Athens Charter would establish a reflection on the city functional, would define the so-called "urbanism keys" seeking to identify the possible functions of the city: to live, to work, to enjoy and to circulate.

Developing a reflection on the theme of city functional, the Athens Charter would define the "keys to urbanism", trying to identify the functions of the city: to live, to work, to enjoy and to circulate. However, the letter gives a reflection on the functional city discussing its interactions with the region to which it belongs. The city would be understood as a part of the overall economic, social and political environment that constitutes the region.

Le Corbusier (1993) states that "an urbanism problem can be faced by constantly referring to the constituent elements of the region and, especially to its geography, up to play a decisive role in this matter: watershed lines, neighboring hills drawing a natural outline confirmed by routes naturally by the soil. No action may be considered if it is not designed to the harmony of the region. The plan of the city is just one elements composed by the regional plan."

However, before the Athens Charter, other authors have thought on a planning that would infer the administrative boundaries of the city and which would understand the region.

According Choay (1979), Ebenezer Howard, in 1898, published the book *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Social Reform*, whereas in 1902, the same work would be published under the title *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*.

In his famous three magnets diagram, Howard discussed the countryside and the city power of attraction, and proposed a new element of magnet attraction city-countryside, i.e., the garden city. Howards's model also had a conception of a system of cities, in which, when a garden city reached 30,000 inhabitants there would be complemented by other new city. The new city would be built preserving gardens and peripherals fields, it would have vias that would make integration with other cities to ensure cooperation between them. Around a central city of 58,000 inhabitants there would be built new cities whose growth would be restrained by the agricultural zone.

However, according to Hall (1995), the great conceptual reference to the consolidation of the idea of a regional planning would be found in the work of urban planner Patrick Geddes (1834-1932). Geddes publishes his book *Cities in Evolution*, proposing city and countryside union on a regional scale, advocating the need for developing interdisciplinary research that would precede the proposed regional planning. The plan would begin with a survey of the resources of a particular natural region.

To GEDDES (1994, p.48), there would be the need for a new word to identify regional groupings.

These city-region, these city-grouping ask for a name. We cannot call them constellations; the vocabulary conglomerations seem closer to this reality, but it is not yet relevant. And conurbations? This may be the necessary word, the expression of this new form of demographic grouping, which is already subconsciously, developing new forms of social grouping, and then, government and administration well defined. (GEDDES, 1994, p.48)

### **3 The concept of region according to Milton Santos**

To Milton Santos, exponent of contemporary Geography, the reflection on region starts from the analysis of space and its role on technique shaping applied by man. For him, the space is part of the content that is the subject of historical and social study, not just a stage on which this transformation takes place continuously, as suggested by the traditional geography.

Both the region and the place are subspaces subject to the same general laws of evolution, where time is a condition of possibility and the geographical entity is a preexisting condition of opportunity. Every temporalization practice is a spatialization practice, which violates the solidarities and the previous limits, and creates new ones. (SANTOS, 2006, p.108)

In his work, which theorizes on the urbanization of developing countries, Santos establishes the relationship between developed technique by man over time, a progress that is only possible through science and, that leaves marks while transforming the space occupied, and therefore, the regional landscape.

Space reproduces the social totality while these transformations are determined by social, economic and political needs. Thus, the space reproduces itself within the totality, when it evolves according to the way of production and its successive moments. But space also influences the evolution of other structures and, therefore, becomes a fundamental component of the totality social and its movements. (SANTOS 1982, p.18).

From this notion of space, the author states that the appearing of solidarity among groups that occupy it brings the notion of region. He emphasizes that the notion of solidarity is not based on the moral aspect, but on the coexistence brought by the interdependence among these groups, either by necessity of mutual protection, economic or any other necessity.

In Milton Santos we found space as a social instance, a homogeneous set of objects and actions. In this context, the author analyzes the landscape as an "internal analytical

category" to space, as well as the territorial configuration and territorial division of labor, for example. (SANTOS, 2006, p. 12)

Landscape is the set of forms that, at a given moment, express the inheritance which represent the successive relations localized between man and nature" (*ibid.*). There is a cutout in the landscape where time passes through, gathering objects from the past, sharing the space with others under construction or transformation, while await new uses and provisions that are, by change, determined by techniques developed ahead. This temporality gathered in one place highlights the difference between space and landscape: this is a material system, while that is a value system; objects "do not change place, but change their function, i.e., of significance, of systemic value " (SANTOS, 2006, p.66).

Several fields of knowledge, such as architecture, urbanism, geography, biology, and painting, among others, used different dimensions and different conceptual interpretations of the landscape.

To Donadieu & Périgord (2007, apud MATOS 2010, p.14) the word landscape, in Germanic languages, would be referring the territory, but for the Latin languages the word would refer an image or a representation.

The Latin origin of the word landscape would be from the contradictory relationship between countryside and city, between the natural and humane, between the spontaneous and constructed.

This set of forms, endowed with continuous inheritance and succession relations between man and nature, countryside and city, natural and constructed, identified as landscape, has a particular moment in history to be thought of as a complex set of environmental resources that would constitute the region.

The landscape extrapolates, thus, the arbitrary barriers and boundaries of rural and urban, and would cover the interactions of the regional context.

In this sense, Howard diagrammatic models would allow the opening of a reflective and experimental field that would allow the possibility of designing an ideal and solidarity regional city.

According Argollo Ferrão (2007, p.92) there would exist in the contemporary world a rural environment built identified as "non-urban space", which unlike a traditional bucolic aspect, would attract actions, projects and investments directed to its cultural heritage that would make its sustainability and recovery. It would defend a planning for rural areas with the delimitation of boundaries along the same patterns of rural urban. A possible rural perimeter would identify the areas with a strong agrarian inclination, valuing the landscape and rural heritage. A metropolitan area or an agricultural area might be composed of cities with their respective perimeters or boundaries or rural perimeters, and the remaining space would be identified as non-urban space.

#### 4 Conclusion

Morus' experience in creating a perfect society, egalitarian and cooperative integrated to its environment and its region has opened a reflective field that made possible to identify other narratives and previous discourses that also addressed the creation of perfect and happy societies, as showed by Chauí (2008).

The urban disorder installed since the industrial revolution and disorderly development of the cities have led some authors to think or to conceive new possibilities or alternatives for the city and for the region.

Choay (1979), dealing with and reporting urban experiences as utopias and realities, identifies on the set of his anthology, specific propositions that dealt not only with the city but tried to comprehend the region.

A regional planning that could overcome the divisions between rural and urban areas, aiming at a planning, would substitute the idea of competition by the idea of solidarity and cooperation.

In this sense, the reflection on the concepts and terms of the referential authors that addressed the regional issue is configured as a task of fundamental importance for the development of new models, new proposals and new utopias for regional planning of contemporary cities.

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