



## Research Paper

## Patrick Geddes and applied planning practice

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## ABSTRACT

Patrick Geddes made substantial contributions to applied planning practice by promoting academic, professional and public awareness of urbanism, regionalism and civics. He contributed to university and adult education, and through his publications, summer schools, exhibitions and museum projects he reached a much broader public, not just in Britain but also in other parts of Western Europe, North America, the Eastern Mediterranean, and South Asia. He pushed forward a series of institutional projects, and as a planning consultant he wrote numerous reports and several significant city plans, most notably in India and Palestine between 1914 and 1924.

## 1. Introduction

Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) had a unique interdisciplinary perspective. He completed no university degrees, but he read, networked, wrote, published and “pontificated” across a broad range of disciplines: botany, zoology, economics, sociology, geography, urban planning, civics, education, theatre, literature, art, and Celtic Studies. I use the word “pontificated” quite deliberately, because Geddes engaged in a form of non-religious preaching. His topic was not theology, sacred texts or the prospect of an afterlife, but rather ways to make the lives of ordinary persons and communities better here on earth. He interwove natural science, social science, and the arts and humanities to build a vision of continuing education and a better life for all. His approach to planning focused on civic and regional surveys, data compilation, public education, social mobilization, and university-community partnerships. During his life his interdisciplinary spread often appeared absurdly ambitious, far beyond human capacity to build expertise across such a wide range of subjects. In the 21st century, however, it adapts well to the realities of “big data,” global interdependency, and the growing concern for sustainability and resilience.

Geddes generally avoided making political statements, but he clearly favored highly decentralized forms of socio-political organization, placing most power and resources in the hands of local communities. His politics were participatory and communitarian, and his international networks and experience covered most of Western Europe, Mexico, the United States, the Eastern Mediterranean, and South Asia. He held a Chair of Botany at University College Dundee from 1889 till 1919, and a Chair of Sociology and Civics at the University of Bombay from 1919 till 1924, but he spent only a few weeks each year at those universities, associating himself more with Edinburgh University and with fledgling institutions like Crosby Hall in London and the Scots

College in Montpellier. Much of his adult life was dedicated to traveling, visiting lectures, summer schools, exhibitions, correspondence, academic writing across a wide range of disciplines, and urban planning consultancy.

## 2. Geddes and the diffusion of planning ideas

The papers in this section focus on Geddes’s intellectual breadth, linking the sciences, the social sciences, and the arts and humanities within a broad framework of civics and public policy.

Kristina Tajchman uses Geddes’s Place-Work-Folk model to analyze the energy-water nexus, one of the most important and least appreciated environmental issues. Both energy and water are crucial to human life, but few policy-makers have realized that pumping, heating, cooling and purifying water requires large amounts of energy, and that generating energy requires large amounts of water, not just in hydroelectric projects and in manufacturing turbines and solar panels, but also in the cooling towers of most thermo-electric power generation plants. Tajchman’s analysis illustrates the extraordinary interdisciplinarity of Geddes’s thinking, emphasizing relationships and interdependencies that more narrowly-focused thinkers ignore.

Brook Muller, Josh Cerra and Robert Young use Geddes’s 1890s Edinburgh “Outlook Tower” project as a springboard to build a vision for a 21st century institution and system designed to promote awareness, education and civic action related to the interface between society, urbanization and environment. The focus is on climate change – how communities can reduce, mitigate, adapt to, and harness its effects. This paper is an extraordinary example of how Geddesian visionary thought and interdisciplinary ideals can be adapted and re-modelled to confront contemporary problems.

Marco Amati, Robert Freestone and Sarah Robertson provide a

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comprehensive summary of Geddes's interest in international expositions, and of the development of his Cities and Town Planning Exhibition shown in several European and Indian cities, and also in Jerusalem, between 1910 and 1920. His Exhibitions were designed both to educate and to inspire ordinary citizens and civic leaders. They increased public knowledge of world urbanism, and they raised awareness of planning issues and potential solutions.

Taken together, the three papers illustrate one of the most important broad principles:— that, “planning involves designing the future of a community over time, thus giving it some rational, meaningful pattern, and the shaping of its history to the extent that control over environmental factors permits” (Friedmann, 1973, 6). Past plans have helped to mold our contemporary world, and future peoples will attribute elements of their recent history to plans made and implemented by past generations. Thus, planning is both prospective and visionary, and also retrospective and historical. Plans for the future may both build upon lessons of the past and also seek to preserve historical and environmental treasures for future generations. Geddes was a pioneer in recognizing the significance and interdependence of the spatial, temporal and environmental dimensions of planning, and in developing means to communicate these relationships through exhibitions, museums, visual and performing arts, summer schools, and civic and regional surveys. Civics, planning, regionalism and urbanism were all built into his vision for lifelong continuing education.

During his lifetime Geddes proposed several more Outlook Towers, most notably for Indore in India and for Montpellier in France, and Ferreira and Jha (1976) chose *The Outlook Tower* as the title for their edited collection of essays on urbanization in India and around the world. The tower, in essence, was a museum, a laboratory and a conference center where information and ideas on local, regional and global issues could be analyzed and synthesized. It was a dynamic and permanent exhibition, broadly based on the place-work-folk nexus, where planning ideas and ideals could be developed and diffused. On a more temporary basis, and especially when associated with major international expositions like the one held in Ghent in 1913, Geddes's exhibitions functioned like a mobile Outlook Tower, bringing his message to major cities around the world that had not yet established a permanent facility.

### 3. Geddes as planning consultant

Most of Geddes's writing on urbanism and planning focused on diffusing planning ideas or reporting on planning issues, rather than actually making plans. Various associates of Geddes, for example Patrick Abercrombie, Raymond Unwin and H.V. Lanchester wrote plans and designed buildings, following the standard model of the architect-planner, but that was not Geddes's approach. He needed an assistant or partner to draw maps and diagrams and to take photographs for his works, and he rarely exhibited detailed architectural and engineering designs. When he focused on city and neighborhood development strategies, he contributed text and ideas, relying on others for graphic detail. He was most enthusiastic about small to medium-sized institutional projects like his garden at University College Dundee, his tenement rehabilitation for cooperative university residences in Edinburgh through the Town and Gown Association (Johnson & Rosenberg, 2010), and his pioneering projects for Ramsay Gardens in Edinburgh, Crosby Hall in London, and the Scots and Indian Colleges in Montpellier.

The nearest Geddes came to a full-blown plan before the First World War was *City Development* (Geddes, 1904), his lavishly illustrated report to the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust. It is easy to criticize this document as a massive shopping-list of projects without cost and funding information, and to point out that most of his projects never came to fruition. Nevertheless, any visitor to Pittencreeff Park in Dunfermline will testify that the park is an extraordinary public amenity with a great variety of civic activities for a city of 50,000, and that the park exemplifies many of the environmental and civic virtues that Geddes

sought to promote.

The Dunfermline Plan illustrates a key principle of planning consultancy; that success begins by satisfying and inspiring the client. The plan was commissioned by associates of Andrew Carnegie, a migrant from Dunfermline who had built one of the world's largest fortunes in the United States. It is reasonable to speculate that Geddes did not need to calculate costs and make detailed cost-effectiveness analyses for his projects. He just had to write a plan that captured the imagination of Carnegie or one of his representatives in Dunfermline. Beyond Dunfermline, all Geddes's direct contributions to city planning were based on consultancies in South Asia and Palestine, and the same principle applied.

After arriving in India in the Fall of 1914, and with many of his personal ambitions derailed by the outbreak of World War I, Geddes reordered his priorities. He had been invited to India by Lord Pentland, the Governor of Madras, to show his Cities and Town Planning Exhibition, but after he arrived in India with his son Alasdair, they learned that the exhibition had been lost at sea when the cargo ship *Clan Grant* was sunk by the German cruiser *Emden*. It took several months for Geddes's friends in Europe to assemble and send a replacement exhibition, and in the meantime he devoted himself to planning consultancies. Initially he did regional surveys of towns in the Madras and Bombay Presidencies, commissioned by the British Governors, but then he opened up a more substantial line of work making city plans for Maharajas, the Indian rulers of Princely States; suzerainties within the Empire that had agreed to keep the peace, pay taxes, and be loyal to the British Crown. Geddes went on to do over 30 commissioned planning reports and city plans in British India, as well as a few zoo and university campus projects. He also did plans for Colombo (Ceylon), and for several cities and sites in British occupied Palestine. From 1915 till 1923, therefore, Geddes's primary occupation was as city planning consultant, though he also showed his exhibitions in six Indian cities and in Paris and Jerusalem, traveled and lectured in Europe, Palestine and the USA, and taught intermittently at the University of Bombay.

Jaqueline Tyrwhitt's (1947) *Patrick Geddes in India* focuses on Geddes's “conservative surgery” concept and his promotion of historic preservation, major elements in most of his India plans. He advocated neighborhood improvement efforts with minimal demolition and widespread rehabilitation of existing structures, trying to preserve as much as possible of the original neighborhood character and community (Scott & Bromley 2013, 103–129). His writings inspired one of Tyrwhitt's students, John F.C. Turner, who became the leading figure in the worldwide movement to upgrade shanty-town neighborhoods and support self-help housing (Turner, 1976).

One India plan stood out as exceptional, Geddes's 1918 plan for the city of Indore (Bromley, 2017). This plan represented ten months of continuous effort by Geddes in 1917–1918, and at two volumes and almost 500 pages, it was much longer and more detailed than his other city plans. It included detailed plans for a major urban expansion with an industrial area and garden suburbs to the north-east of the existing city, a scheme for a University of Central India with an Outlook Tower to be located close to the city center, and plans for a zoo and botanical garden on the south side of the city. It also included plans to eliminate the city's rat and plague problems, to end the dumping of sewage and waste into the rivers, and to develop organic farming “drainage gardens” in the residential neighborhoods, based on composting waste materials including human and animal excrement. Geddes was allowed to re-route and re-focus the city's Diwali festival parade in 1917, turning a religious and ceremonial event into a civic education project focusing on cleanliness and the elimination of rats and plague (Geddes, 1925).

Significant portions of Geddes's India plans were eminently practical, and the Indore Plan included detailed cost information for many of the proposed projects. Implementation depended on the means, judgment and determination of those who had commissioned the plans.

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