

Foreword

Josef Stübben (1845-1936) was one of the most important and widely known city planners of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although he was a prolific writer, and he wrote some articles in English, his major work, “Der Städtebau” (“Town building”), an encyclopedic text on the principles and practice of city planning, was never translated into English. The unfortunate consequence is that this highly significant planning textbook has never been made widely available to an English speaking audience. Now, as the lost art of city building is experiencing a rebirth in the U.S., Stübben’s great work is regaining attention.

The first edition of this book was published in 1890. It was the equivalent of an encyclopedia of city planning, Reinhard Baumeister has published in 1876 the first book on City Building. In 1890 Hermann Josef Stuebben published his part of the Handbook on Town Building in a very detailed way. The second edition followed in 1907 and the third in 1924. The 1890 edition was reprinted in Germany, in 1980 and is still considered to be a useful text on city planning, not just a historical document. The final edition of “Der Städtebau” included 900 illustrations, presented in thirty chapters and twenty-three appendices.

Stübben was a Berlin-trained architect who also had a doctorate in civil engineering. He was appointed head of the office of city planning, first in Aachen from 1876 to 1881 and then at Cologne, Posen and Berlin where he worked as Geheimer Baurat (architect to the political institutions and Beigeordneter(member of the community Council). During his career he was involved in city planning studies of more than thirty cities in Germany and abroad. The book “Der Städtebau” uses materials and draws from the experiences of his long career as a city planner.

Stübben was one of Europe's best known planners, ranking alongside Camillo Sitte and Raymond Unwin as the leading European planning practitioners with direct influence on the development of American city planning. The major works of Sitte and Unwin are in English and are still being published. Unwin’s 1909 *Town Planning in Practice* was recently reissued by Princeton Architectural Press. Camillo Sitte’s major work, *The Art of Building Cities* (1889), was translated into English in 1945 and is now widely known to American planners and architects. The lack of an English translation of Stübben’s major city planning text from the same period is an obvious, missing link.

Stübben had a high profile and presented papers at numerous city planning conferences. One of the most important was his address at the 1910 conference on city planning sponsored by the Royal Institute of British Architects in which Daniel Burnham, Ebenezer Howard, Patrick Geddes and Raymond Unwin were

also featured. Also in that year, the U.S. Senate published an official document on the new American profession of city planning that contained examples of German planning legislation under the direct influence of Stübben.

Most historians agree that the basis of American city planning, which was professionalized in 1909, is largely drawn from two sources: England and Germany. Historian Brian Ladd, in his 1990 book *Urban Planning and Civic Order in Germany, 1860-1914*, wrote: “The academic discipline and administrative practice of city planning as we know it today, however, was born in Germany during the decades before World War I” (p. 1). It is also recognized that the roots of German planning have not been as widely studied as the English roots. That Stübben was never translated is probably due to the fact that the U.S. fought two major wars with Germany during the 20th century. One scholar noted that the volume of German material being cited and translated in architectural journals went from “a generous proportion in 1900 to a mere trickle in 1911”.

Yet before World War I, German city planning was much admired in America, during the time when American city planning was in its formative years. Many American planners, among them Daniel Burnham, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., and John Nolen made regular trips to Germany during this time to study how the Germans, generally regarded as exemplary city planners, were addressing their planning problems. Daniel Burnham took a grand tour of Germany in 1901 and wrote that he believed the Germans were far ahead of the Americans in their planning expertise. The German approach was heralded because, the American planners believed, the Germans were able to achieve the fundamental goal of planning at the time: the merger of the goals of beauty and efficiency (what was practical was beautiful and vice versa).

Current Relevance of Stübben

The translation of Stübben’s book is relevant on two fronts: as an important historical document and as a still-relevant manual of town planning practice. As a historical work, the book will provide important insights into early city planning practice in the U.S., because of Stübben’s influence here. But perhaps more importantly, “*Der Städtebau*” is still useful and relevant today, as planners seek to revive the lost traditions of town planning that were at the forefront of planning in the early 20th century.

Stübben’s work will be of particular relevance to the many people involved in what is known as New Urbanism, an urban planning and design movement with about 2,000 paying members working to reform the way cities are built in the U.S. This movement extends beyond the New Urbanist organization itself and is now

embedded in much of the current thinking about city planning practice.

The basic agenda is to reform all aspects of real estate development, including new development, urban retrofits, and suburban infill. In all cases, New Urbanist neighborhoods are designed to be pedestrian oriented and contain a diverse range of housing types and land uses. There is support for regional planning for open space, appropriate architecture, a more prominent and well-designed public realm, historic restoration, safe streets and green building, among other principles.

Importantly, the New Urbanists have worked to revive the art of city building by looking to past practitioners. Planners working in the first decades of the 20th century are particularly relevant precisely because of the specificity of their planning proposals. They were deeply involved in formulating the design of urban places, from streets to plazas and squares, to complete neighborhoods, parks, and all other fundamentals about how cities can be beautifully designed. To the New Urbanists and many others working to revive these lost traditions, this was city and town planning at its finest.

Obviously, the principles of city planning that Stübben detailed in his encyclopedic work will not be directly transferable in all cases. But they are a critical resource for understanding the logic of planning cities in a way that merges practical, technical and artistic notions of human settlement. How these elements of the urban environment are put together is something city planners, and especially the New Urbanists, are dedicated to understanding, reviving and implementing.

Stübben's "Der Städtebau" will be a much needed addition to the lexicon of the art of city building.

Emily Talen
Julia Koschinsky