

REGIONAL STUDIES ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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CONTENTS

Editorial	Page 2
From the Executive Secretary	2
Annual Student Conference	3
Advert of Irish Branch Book	3
British Regionalism Conference 1900-2000	4
Letter from America	4
Buswatch	7
The Cassa Per Il Mezzogiorno: Going, Going, Gone?	8
European Regional Incentives - 1987 edition	9
Forecasting Local Housing Requirements	9
European Briefing	11
The North-South Jobs Divide in the UK	13
Branch News	15
Recent Publications from the Coalfield Communities Campaign	21
Publications	22
Diary	24

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29 Great James Street, London WC1N 3ES
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University of Salford September 10th-11th 1987

A joint two day conference of the Regional Studies Association
and the Planning History Group

The purpose of the conference British Regionalism 1900-2000 is twofold: first, to recount the history of regionalism and regional reform, from the early development of the regional idea by C.B. Fawcett, G.D.H. Cole, Patrick Geddes and H.G. Wells, through the pre-war and wartime experiments in regional planning and administration, to the cul-de-sac of the Kilbrandon Commission and the Regional Economic Planning Councils. And second, as the title implies, the conference will analyse the nature of regionalism and its continued potential as a principle for reform within the United Kingdom, in order to look forward to emerging forms of government for Britain at the end of the century.

Speakers will include Derek Urwin, Brian Robson, Michael Burgess, Ray Hudson, David Massey, Dennis Hardy, Michael Hebbert, Pat Garside, Michael Wise, Michael Goldsmith, Diana Pearce, Urlan Wannop, Wayne Parsons, Yvo Peters and Michael Keeting.

Poster sessions will give other participants an opportunity to display their work (contact Pat Garside if you are interested).

Any queries concerning the programme and arrangements for British Regionalism 1900-2000 should be addressed to:-

(Programme matters) - Dr M Hebbert, LSE, Houghton Street, London WC2 2AE.
(Administrative matters) - Dr P Garside, Environmental Sciences, University of Salford, Salford M5 4WT or Sally Parkinson, Regional Studies Association, 29 Great James Street, London WC1N 3ES.

LETTER FROM AMERICA

URBAN POLICY WITHOUT THE URBAN

U.S. urban policy in the 1980's has undergone dramatic change. Indeed policy architects have sought to design a national programme which, as far as possible, is no longer urban. Documented in reports such as Urban America in the Eighties (UAE), Rethinking Urban Policy (RUP), and the recent Brookings sponsored study edited by Paul E. Peterson, The New Urban Reality. This policy approach claims that "there are no national urban problems" and that placing "the swirl of local and regional concerns ahead of an overall concern for the nation is both inappropriate and ill-advised" (UAE, 1980). A new policy orientation is needed which recognizes that "a new urban system is emerging" (Hanson, 1984). The concentrated,

centralized and manufacturing-based urban landscape of the past is giving way to a global system of deconcentrated, decentralized and service-based structures. The future importance of cities in this system is in doubt. For this reason national policy should be guided by a strategy of rational "adjustment" rather than intentional change. In contrast to those who claim that funding retrenchment in housing, urban development and social services amount to an "assassination of the Great Society" (Lekachman, 1981), the globalists argue that these represent the "policy-guided disinvestment" and "slenderizing" necessary to prepare America for the new global competition (UAE, 1980).

Nothing less than the demise of cities is predicted. Cities are "no longer the most desirable settings for living, working or producing" (UAE, 1980). The analysis is tough-minded: "Industries rose and fell - and so did empires, and so did cities" (Fallows, 1985). Efforts to resist change are not only futile but dangerous: "A rebuilt South Bronx can only lure the jobless into remaining longer ... reconstructed homes will be transformed into slums soon enough, and ... the torch will be back at the task of destroying them" (Baumol, 1981). Rather than undertaking "a counter-productive effort to keep losers afloat" (Long, 1983), the appropriate national response is to allow "the fates and fortunes of specific places ... to fluctuate" (NAE, 1980). This is perceived as fully consistent with "the American immigrant tradition":

"I was being told ... by people whose last names would have been very much at home in Florence or Milan ... how I dared to tear people away from the roots they had established. I wasn't cheeky enough to say anything then ... (but) so many of their families had decided to migrate and they'd found a better life. They were angry at the advice that America help others do the same."
(Donald Hicks, principal author of Urban America in the Eighties quoted in Fallows, 1985).

In the globalist vision, the concepts and analytic frameworks of traditional urban geography, demography and economics, regional science, and even urban politics and sociology have little, if any contemporary relevance. Agglomerative and localization economies, compaction dynamics and land-use specialization can still be recognized, but the study of these urban features can only reinforce a sense of the declining significance of urban places. Multinucleation, polycentrism, population size, density and distribution may be interesting topics for urban geographers and demographers to investigate, but one gets the impression that the study of these things is not terribly important from a policy perspective. And the notions of democratic citizenship and community as locally rooted seem quaint but outmoded ideas of a bygone era.

A new language of urban analysis is developing. Cities have been replaced on the social plain by "command and control centers", "specialized satellites", "subordinate service nodes", and "high-tech nests". The fixed boundaries of physical space have been superceded by the forces of "variable geometry" as a "space of flows" substitutes for a "space of places" (Castells, 1985). Expectably, social strategies appropriate to the new space have new names and purposes. The old ways of targeting public efforts to affect specific places and conditions are out. The fashion is to improve less tangible things like entrepreneurial spirit and inventiveness. For which we need development "incubators" to "spin-off" new enterprises; technology centers to "hatch" new ideas; and, not to be overlooked, "economic intelligence systems" and "information sentries" to monitor progress at transition and to identify "mid-life retooling" needs.

If all goes as forecasted, the new global order will be, as far as possible, featureless. In that way, a vibrant life of perpetual motion can be enjoyed by one and all. What urban crisis?

by John Byrne and Cecilia Martinez, Center for Energy and Urban Policy Research, College of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Delaware.

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BUSWATCH

In the wake of de-regulation of the buses, an independent nationwide bus monitoring project has been established by local authorities, academics and transport planners. RSA members who would like more information, or want to participate, should contact the National Co-ordinator, Jo Guiver, who describes the project in the following short article. Jo's address is BUSWATCH, UNIT 5.2.10, White Cross, LANCASTER, LA1 4XH, Telephone 0524-388525.

'Deregulation works.' It doesn't.

It has saved millions of pounds in subsidy. It has left thousands of people bus-less.

How do we know? Buswatch was set up to find out. Measuring the effects of any law as complex and far reaching as the 1985 Transport Act is fraught with difficulty and politics. Buswatch was set up by various organisations worried that parts of the Act would cause a worsening of the bus service, in terms of both quality and quantity, for some passengers. As such it is biased, but if it finds that deregulation and the associated changes has been in the best interests of the passengers it will be delighted to report that.

Information is gathered through a series of two-monthly and one-off surveys filled in by volunteers. They cover most aspects of levels and quality of service, ranging from provision of information at bus stops and on buses to the number of departures and arrivals from an "adopted" bus stop. We would also like to initiate projects for universities, colleges and schools to explore the changing "bus opportunities" from communities.

We are compiling, probably, the most comprehensive collection of local and national press cuttings about the changes in bus services in the country. This has given us an important source of information which has been tapped extensively by the national press and media.

Although there are problems of using self-selecting volunteers, particularly when quantifying problems, we believe the quality of the results