Cities in the 21st Century: A Retrospective Analysis

Occasional Paper No. 14

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by Gary Gappert
1986

The Institute of Urban Studies

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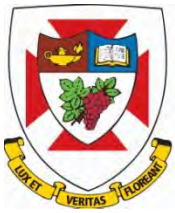

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CITIES IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A RETROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS
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PREFACE

The University of Winnipeg was the location of a major national urban studies conference, hosted by the Institute of Urban Studies in August 1985. The "Canadian Urban Studies Conference" addressed the general theme of "The Canadian Urban Experience - Past and Present." More than ninety specialists spoke during forty separate sessions on such topics as housing and the built environment, economic and community development, planning and urban form, women and the urban environment, and urban government and politics.

This publication is a result of the Canadian Studies Conference. The Institute of Urban Studies is publishing many of the papers presented at the conference in the Institute's publication series. Some of the papers will also appear in the scholarly journal, the Urban History Review/ Revue d'histoire urbaine and in book form.

This conference represented a major effort on the part of the Institute of Urban Studies in terms of fulfilling its role as a national centre of excellence in the urban studies and housing fields.

Alan F.J. Artibise
Director.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In 1982, the 23rd urban affairs annual, Cities in the 21st Century was published by Sage publications. This volume, consisting of almost 20 chapters written by 23 urban scholars and planners is now in its second printing. As the future is always changing, it is now timely to revisit the urban future as perceived in 1982 and determine whether an update is required. Cities in the 21st Century was not organized around any particular ideological or theoretical orientation to the urban future, but several assumptions guided the development of the publication.

A significant assumption was that the United States, as well as other western nations, was experiencing a major transformation of its economic and technological structure, and that it was more precise to call the society of the future an advanced, rather than a post, industrial society. According to this assumption, the growth of the advanced services sector would be based upon its contribution to industrial productivity in a global economy.

The secondary assumption was that future urban form would be more dependent upon conscious social and political choice than upon the consequences of new technologies. According to this assumption, the evolution of cities in the 21st century would not be as dramatically altered as much as were cities in the late 19th century by the elevator (which created skyscraper skylines) and the electric trolley (which created initial suburbanization).

Linking these two assumptions was the belief that the effective, successful or livable city in the 21st century had to be an intentional city, that its future had to be willful, not accidental, and had to relate to the on-going transformation of a global manufacturing and transactional economy.

In the face of this transformation cities, especially those which had been primarily oriented to manufacturing, would need to rethink their strategies for growth and development. One of the conclusions was that the effective cities of the future would be those which have institutions which can manage technology and knowledge, and also develop an amenity infrastructure attractive to the knowledge worker and which would contribute to the development and maintenance of multinational linkages in the diverse realms of science, industry, commerce, culture and so forth.

This paper reviews four or five of the major conceptual frameworks which were developed by several of the authors. These include:

1) seven scenarios of urban future
2) the advanced industrial society
3) an urban futures management model
4) an urban design perspective
5) other anticipations.

2.0 SEVEN SCENARIOS OF URBAN CHANGE

Arthur Shostak, an urban sociologist and futurist, prepared seven scenarios for urban change originally for a project organized by the Center for Philadelphia Studies. These seven scenarios, can be adapted to any large metropolitan area with varying degrees of emphasis. They represent overlapping patterns of change and continuity that are already present and can be elaborated into the future. The following description of the seven scenarios was taken from Cities in the 21st Century.

1. Conflict City

a) Underlying Issue: What might cities be like if we do as little as possible to change things?

b) Definition: A concept of Philadelphia in decline (Fewer jobs, people, or amenities; scaled-back hope and dreams as a city); Philadelphia in a desperate, troubled struggle to "make do" - as with urban homesteading, town watch patrols, etc.

c) 1981 Counterpart: Detroit; Youngstown; Camden; any large frostbelt city in a "steady state" stage.

d) Implementation Factors: Achieved by drift, inaction, and response to crisis; opposed by pro-action residents, but supported by civic cynicism, lethargy, lack of political vision, and class and race hostility.

2. Wired City

a) Underlying Issue: What are the rewards and risks inherent in mind boggling communication breakthroughs?

b) Definition: A concept of thoroughgoing reliance on telecommunication advances; Philadelphia in a campaign to use new information technologies to revive participatory democracy, to shop from home, to work from home, etc.

c) 1981 Counterpart: Manhattan in New York City, London's Central Business District; Washington, D.C.

d) Implementation Factors: Promoted by commercial pressure on competitive firms and the lure of vast profits in new information services; opposed by technophobes and companies vulnerable to telecommunication breakthroughs.

3. Neighbourhood City

a) Underlying Issue: What fresh role might local communities play in meeting tomorrow's urban needs?

b) Definition: A concept of stronger-than-ever local communities; Philadelphia as a well-co-ordinated configuration of viable

neighborhoods, each with a substantial job base, food raising base, and barter economy linked to those of other neighborhoods.

c) 1981 Counterpart: Santa Barbara, California; Seattle, Washington; Boulder, Colorado.

d) Implementation Factors: Promoted by historic appreciation for small-scale community advantages; opposed by modernists who who perceive the city as a single operational entity; opposed also by those who see neighbourhoods as narrow bastions of self-defeating ethnic and racial isolation.

4. Conservation City

a) Underlying Issue: What can we do to turn energy shortfall to our collective advantage?

b) Definition: A concept of "pulling together" to conserve increasingly scarce and costly fuel supplies; Philadelphia in a drive to build up rather than out so as to save viable land and maximize economies of scale.

c) 1981 Counterpart: Habitat (Montreal); Hong Kong; Tokyo; Manhattan in New York City.

d) Implementation Factors: Promoted by ecology and environmental conservation pressures and partisans; opposed by cultural hostility to "beehive" living arrangements, and by traditional pride in the right to wide options in land development.

5. International City

a) Underlying Issue: What can we do to assure more gains here from an emerging global economy?

b) Definition: A concept of global interrelations; Philadelphia in a worldwide competition to secure new job-offering

factories, offices, and markets from multinational firms; along with a substantial boost in tourism.

c) 1981 Counterpart: Paris; Toronto; Manhattan in New York City.

d) Implementation Factors: Promoted by commercial pressure on competitive firms and the need to secure new jobs for local labour force; opposed by a provincial culture and a tradition of urban insularity and enthocentrism.

6. Regional City

a) Underlying Issue: What sorts of emerging urban problems are best met by a regional response?

b) Definition: A concept of a new political jurisdiction greater than the present 1854 city boundaries; Philadelphia in a substantial collaborative arrangement with surrounding counties and nearby cities; new controls set on land development everywhere in the region.

c) 1981 Counterpart: Greater Miami; Greater Toledo; Greater Toronto; Minneapolis-St. Paul.

d) Implementation Factors: Promoted by recognition of inadequacy of city resources to meet problems with larger scope, and by the need to achieve economies of scale and central political direction; opposed by boosters of traditional political boundaries.

7. Leisure City

a) Underlying Issue: What might urban life resemble when free time and recreation goals increase in our lives?

b) Definition: A concept of Philadelphia with far less of a Calvinist Ethic and work-centred existence than ever known before; Philadelphia oriented around recreation, culture and the "pursuit of happiness."

c) 1981 Counterpart: Reno, Nevada; Palm Beach, California; Orlando, Florida; Anaheim, California.

d) Implementation Factors: Promoted by a steady contraction in the average work year, and by a steady rise in joblessness, and in dual income, smaller, better off households, and by pro-recreation culture; opposed by a Calvinist Work Ethic culture, by those who see leisure undermining the productivity of the local workforce and by those who fear "the devil will make work for idle hands," as in the case of an undereducated permanent caste of unemployables.

The scenarios probably work best, not as a forecast of the urban future, but as a way of presenting new policy choices and issues to both the functional elites and general public of any city.

3.0 THE ADVANCED INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

For the past twenty years, Daniel Bell's theory of a post-industrial society has become an extremely pervasive framework for analyzing the conditions and problems of contemporary society. However, with the emergence of a high-tech economy, the post-industrial framework has lost its conceptual vigor. Bradshaw, writing in California in the late 1970s, first broached an advanced industrial framework emphasizing the following characteristics:

1) the increases in technologically sophisticated and knowledge intensive industrial employment;
2) the growth of the service sector;

3) the development of a massive and varied educational system since the early 1960s;
4) greater social interdependence.

The co-editor of Cities in the 21st Century, Richard V. Knight, using his own research in the evolving nature of metropolitan employment, has developed the significance of this framework for understanding cities. Central to Knight's analysis is his discussion of the advanced industrial sector. The advanced industrial activities, that is knowledge and information intensive activities, are found in organizations in all systems, in service firms and in supportive public and not-for-profit organizations. As goods and services sold in global markets become more knowledge intensive, cities that are successful in becoming centres of the production of knowledge and the advancement of technology will prosper.

According to Knight "The challenge for industrial cities involves a transition from accidental and unplanned manufacturing (labour and capital intensive activities) or working class communities to an advanced industrial city (or knowledge intensive activities) or a "livable cosmopolitan, world-class city."

To achieve an "intentional city" in the future, a new (strategic) consensus must be forthcoming in communities enabling them to participate effectively in a competitive world economy. An urban policy could be designed to facilitate the growth of a local capacity to form strategic concensuses which lay the way for local initiatives and more willful cities.

In the next 20 years, a new kind of city will develop, a world-class city; a city that will be transactional in many of its transactions. Many of these world-class cities will be part of the power or institutional core on which cities are founded and the development by which some cities will be able to become viable and integral parts

of the new global economic system. But not all cities will be able to participate effectively in such a transformation. Each city will have to make a choice; a choice that requires new structures, mechanisms, tools, perspectives and possibly policies and programs.

The concept of a "System Z" society has been used to describe a socio-economic context for the future. This is partially derived from the book, Post-Affluent America: The Social Economy of the Future. A System Z type of economy and society must compete with 2 other possible futures.

One is a System X kind of future in which economic conflict and competition intensifies and leads to social disappointment and political hostility. The other is a System Y kind of future in which a widespread cultural transformation deflects American energies into concerns and activities associated with Quality of Life concepts and accelerates the development of amenity-rich cities as global centres for the fine and performing arts as well as international tourism.

The System Z type of cities will be more focused on the integration of economic and social goals. These cities will be more intentional in their development, be more androgynous in their social character, and will be knowledge-intensive in the global economy.

The system Z perspective is simply a recognition that in the high-tech global economy of the future, social and economic goals and concerns need to be better integrated. Certainly, "the rise and fall" of New York City as recently described by Roger Stan in his new book of that same title is testimony of the urban consequences of a social policy that ignores economic constraints.

Knight has continued to develop the urban consequences of the advanced industrial framework and the relationships in the urban environment which are significant for an economy where the knowledge worker is so significant. (In a forthcoming urban affairs annual under preparation, entitled The Future of Winter Cities, Knight further defines the issues in a chapter entitled "Knowledge and the Advanced Industrial Metropolis").

4.0 AN URBAN FUTURES MANAGEMENT MODEL

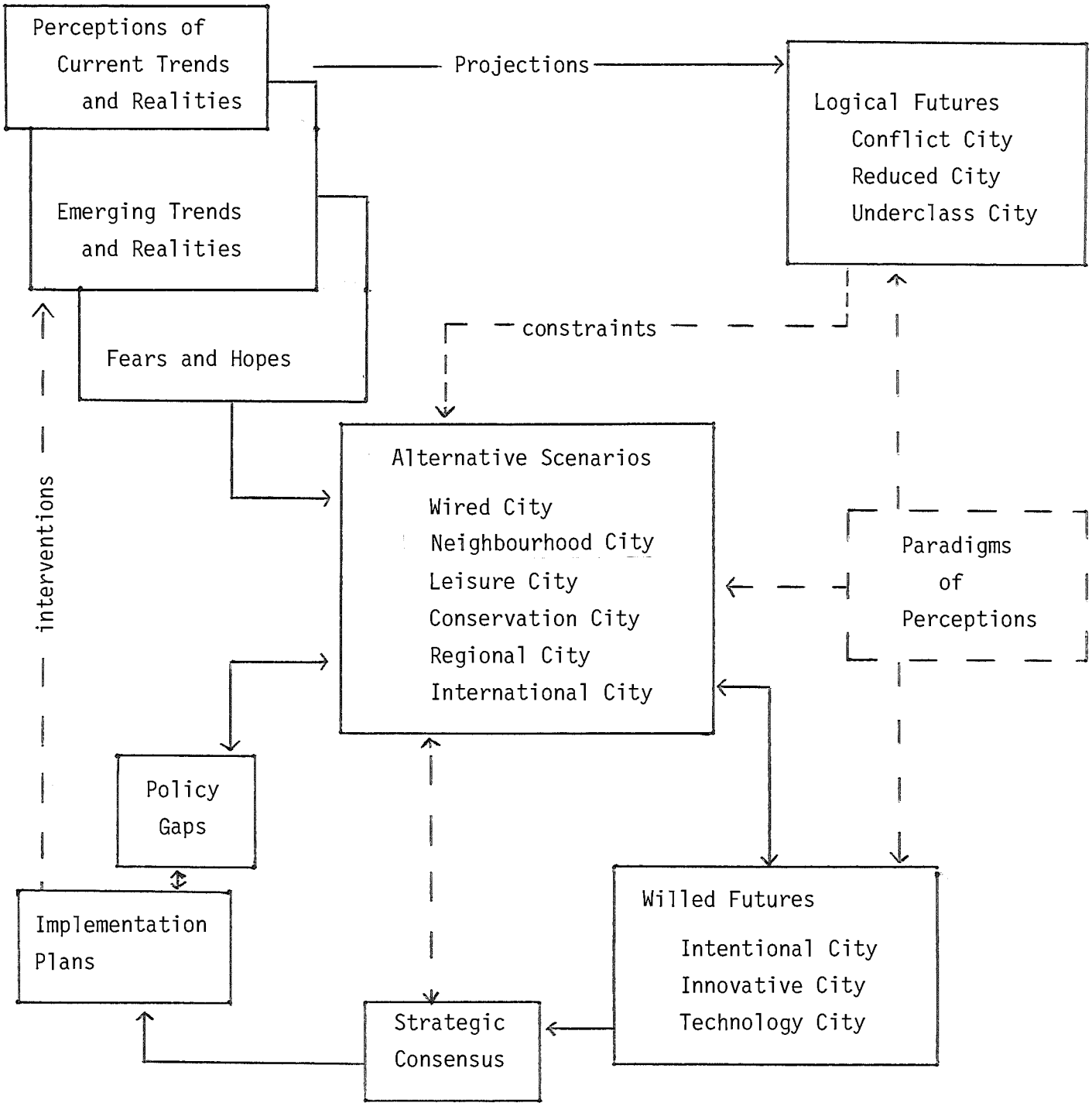
As it will not be easy for cities to plan and implement their future in the emerging global economy, a complex urban futures management model was proposed and is shown in Figure 1. The model incorporates seven urban scenarios discussed earlier.

In this model a simple straight-line extrapolation of existing trends is likely to create only a picture of a conflict city, torn by a combination of racial, social and economic interest. In order to proceed with this model in terms of implementation, an urban community needs to be able to establish a strategic consensus from which a practical policy and program agenda can be derived.

Basically the leadership of the city and region must assess several plausible alternatives for its long-term development and work together to invest in and achieve the most important goals to assure its viability in the initial decades of the 21st century. A significant problem for many cities will be that the members of its ceremonial elite may not recognize the need for a strategic reformulation of urban purpose and form appropriate to our paradigm of an intentional city. Perhaps Canadian cities such as Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver and Edmonton offer better prototypes of strategic urban planning for the future. But as the transformation continues, the need becomes more apparent.

Figure 1

URBAN FUTURES MANAGEMENT MODEL



Source: Cities in the 21st Century, p. 346

5.0 AN URBAN DESIGN PERSPECTIVE

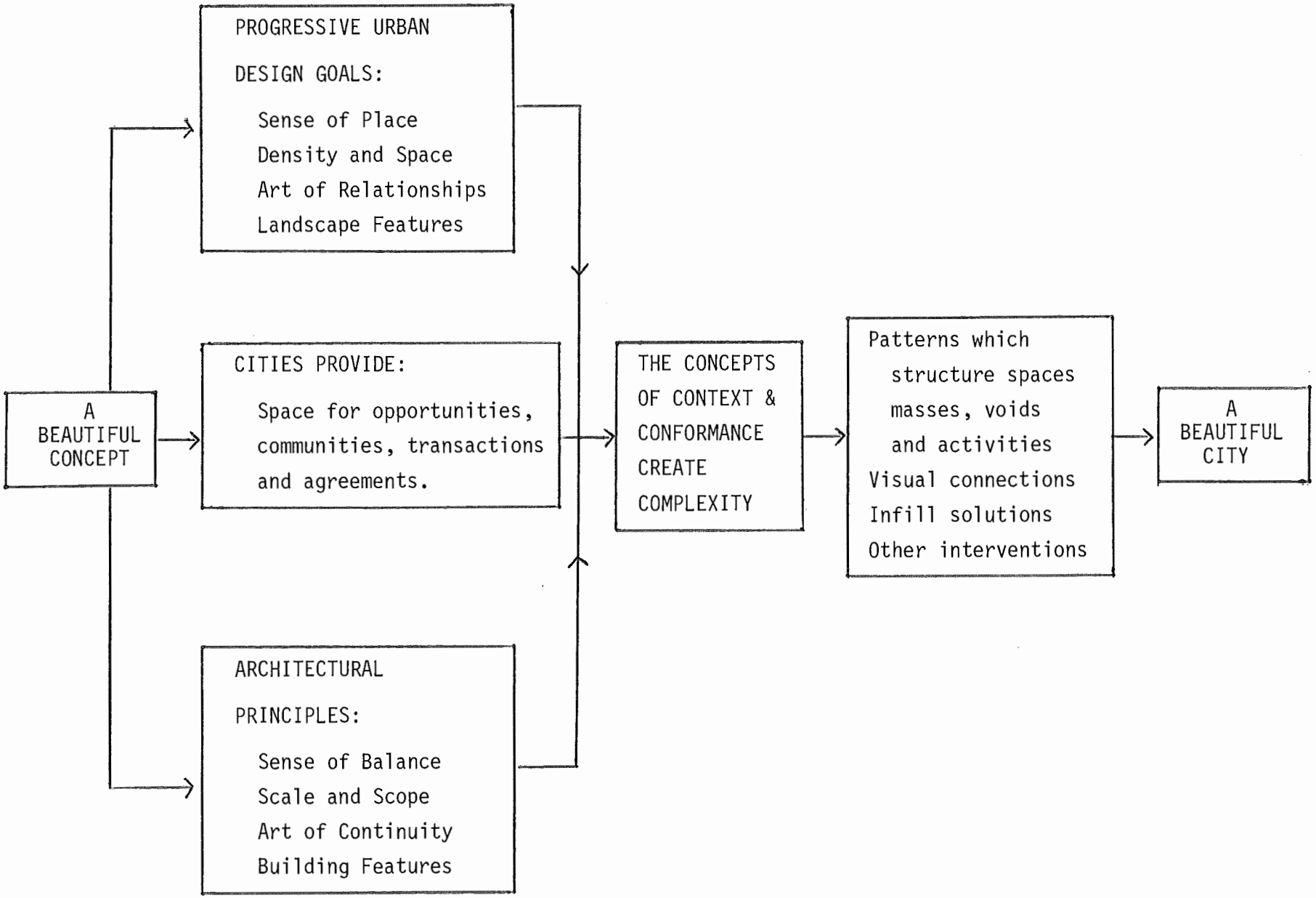
Another contributor to Cities in the 21st Century was Richard Fleischman, a creative architect in Cleveland. He presented an urban design perspective which is summarized if Figure 2.

Fleischman, believing that beautiful cities must begin with beautiful concepts, suggests that the primary principles of both urban design and urban architecture need to be better integrated to create a concept of the context in which usable patterns of urban space can be achieved. For him the challenge of the next decade is to create new kinds of interventions, particularly infill solutions, that will contribute to the "reforming" of the fabric of our evolving urban centres. His concern for maintaining the contextual character that presents a sense of history makes Fleischman an advocate of the recycling theme that has become more prevalent in the 1980s than it was in the 1970s.

With the slowing down of the spread of North American cities to form yet another ring of suburbanization, the need for more infill design solutions that can provide for both residential and commerical intensification has increased. Fleischman's concern is for the evolution of urban patterns that will reinforce the visual form and value of the city, especially for the pedestrian whom he calls the "real city client."

Certainly the proliferation of multibuilding, multiblock walkways (represented by second-story skywalks, street arcades and underground shopping malls),beginning with the Eaton Centre in Toronto, represents a urban development trend that will persist into the 21st century. More recent developments associated with the Livable Winter City Association and drawing upon the innovative architectural work of

Figure 2
URBAN DESIGN PERSPECTIVE



Ralph Erskine in Sweden will also make cities, especially in northern climates, more comfortable to the pedestrian and shopper.

6.0 OTHER ANTICIPATIONS

Many writers in Cities in the 21st Century offered rather pessimistic views about the urban future with an emphasis on sources of new or enhanced conflicts in urban communities. As the recent episode in Philadelphia demonstrates, Shostak's conflict city scenario is already a dire reality as both racial conflict and economic dislocation accelerates in the immediate future.

Other writers were a lot more sanguine. John Blair in particular sees the expansion of the underground economy as a release for economic energies that the normal markets cannot accommodate. But lower expectations and increased disparities are also going to be an enduring aspect of the urban future. Recent projections for 1995 labour force in the U.S. indicate that the number of computer service technicians will double to 108,000 jobs in the next decade but the number of custodians required by 1995 will have jumped by 800,000 from 2.8 million in 1982 to 3.6 million in 1995. The urban future might belong to the janitors!

7.0 CONCLUSION

Some years ago Roger Starr, writing in the Sunday magazine of the New York Times, startled many observers with his call for the planned shrinkage of New York and other older cities. But the alternative turned out to be unplanned shrinkage and partial collapse. With the emergence of a new economic and technological order, the persistent urban problem is how to prepare and propose an equitable and peaceful social order that is consistent and complementary to it.

As Richardson writes in Cities in the 21st Century, the city of the future will not be like the industrial city of 1850 to 1950, and there is not much point in planners and policy makers trying to bring it back.

The transactional city paradigm proposed by Jean Gottman some 20 years ago, now increasingly provides the basis for thinking about the future of North American cities and should perhaps be more widely utilized by both urban scholars and urban planners.