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The post-war reconstruction planning of London

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ABSTRACT
The replanning of London following the Second World War is, in many ways, a familiar story. However it has often been told in fragments, usually prioritizing the best-known plans and the involvement of Professor Patrick Abercrombie. This paper positions the replanning more widely, considering a hierarchy from region to specific locales, and the problems of fragmented planning within such a structure. It explores issues of agents, agency and authority. The sanitized and orderly vision of a new London is set against a more complex and disordered reality of reconstruction-plan production. The urgency, scale and complexity of the task, and questions of why should 'author' plans, are significant issues. The realities of postwar London have been shaped by a messy and misunderstood process.

KEYWORDS
London; post-Second World War; replanning; reconstruction; authority; Patrick Abercrombie

Introduction

London, by far the UK's largest city, was both its worst-damaged city during the Second World War but was also clearly suffering from significant pre-war social, economic and physical problems. Yet London was also one of the world's largest cities; the focus of an empire, of international trade, and a national capital. Solving these problems was one of the world's largest and most complex planning tasks. Much has been written about London's replanning and rebuilding[1] and, although attempts to provide general accounts of London often drown in detailed data, there are significant factors that can only emerge from such an attempt. Most studies have focused on one plan or author, or compared a small number of plans: this paper presents a wider overview and uses a new lens to explore plans and planning.

Officially-sanctioned, scientifically-informed technocentric plans for replanning post-Second World War London not only provide an idealized and orderly perspective of the new metropolis, they also generate powerful enduring effects, helping to generate particularly long-lasting narratives of how the city could be modernized and experienced.[2] Regardless of how contradictory such accounts may be, they can play a significant role in shaping investment decisions, enhancing civic pride and municipal boosterism, and influencing individuals' everyday encounters with particular urban sites, sometimes over an extended period.[3] In so doing, this adds to the collective memory and sense of identity of London, encouraging people to conceptualize the city in particular ways. For example, the legacy of those 'great plans' and 'great planners' creates a sense that Patrick

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Abercrombie, knighted in 1947 for his contributions to planning, was (almost) solely responsible for the post-war reconstruction planning activity in London. His influence, and the legacy of 'his' London plans, The *County of London Plan* (1943), commissioned by the London County Council (LCC), co-written with J. M. Forshaw, and the *Greater London Plan* (1945),[4] looms large in 'traditional' planning histories that help, directly or indirectly, to perpetuate and legitimize certain readings of London, thereby propagating social, economic and moral visions for the city beyond the plans' implementation.[5] Distributed to the public using a range of textual, mapping, film and other colourful 'technocratic visual language', 'a celebration of the specialist expertise of its instigators'[6] was used to juxtapose the problems of the disorderly, overcrowded and sprawling city with the promise of a sanitized and regulated future urban fabric. In this, new 'organic' neighbourhoods, congruent land uses, and sensitively managed dispersal of populations were designed for a dynamic metropolis lying at the heart of the post-war Commonwealth.[7] Yet there were many other plans, and this complexity is often overlooked in most histories.

Moreover, recently-published newspaper articles, YouTube videos, blogs, and opinion pieces continue to re-appraise the enduring influence of Abercrombie and his intimate association with replanning post-war London, influencing popular and professional accounts of contemporary city life. There is a general tendency within these accounts to praise the 'optimism [and] diagrammatic speculation'[8] of 'Abercrombie's plan'[9] to enthuse different audiences. Other messages emerge, too, particularly for those urban actors involved with reshaping contemporary London; city governors, public-private partnerships and different communities can learn valuable lessons around how 'Abercrombie came up with the city's first and only comprehensive plan', and his adoption of modern, comprehensive ideas relating to 'transport, open spaces and the blending of industry and housing'.[10] The reality, of course, is different.

The influence of Abercrombie and 'his' London plans is, apparently, inescapable. Yet a large number of London plans was produced, albeit concentrated into a short period, and they ranged from formal to very informal, and from regional scale to the smallest local level (Figure 1). This body of work has shaped the history of planning, the contemporary approaches to planning, and still resonates in contemporary debates.[11] But much critical attention focused on the proposed physical product, especially the seductively-illustrated but flawed *beaux-arts* street layouts of the Royal Academy plans. However, there was much more to the replanning of London, and this paper explores a hierarchy of plans, a range of planners, and a large degree of inertia and inaction in the 1940s and into the 1950s. In this London was not atypical; but the scale of the task, and the prominence afforded to one individual, are unusual.

Perspectives on reconstruction

We need to look beyond traditional planning histories to unpick the relationships between local authorities, planners, architects and other professionals together with the public consumption of planning ideas which entailed a more pluralist activity involving multiple actors across scales and times.[12] Efforts are required to contextualize those seemingly top-down and male-dominated ideas of 'great planners', emphasizing a consensus for modern wholesale change designed to radically remodel seemingly outdated nineteenth-century cities, using technocentric forms of intervention to promote speed, efficiency, light and air, control and separation.[13] This paper is part of that wider effort. It draws on three sets of sources: the contents of the plans themselves; what was written about them at the time, including reviews and archive sources; and what has subsequently been written about them and their authors.

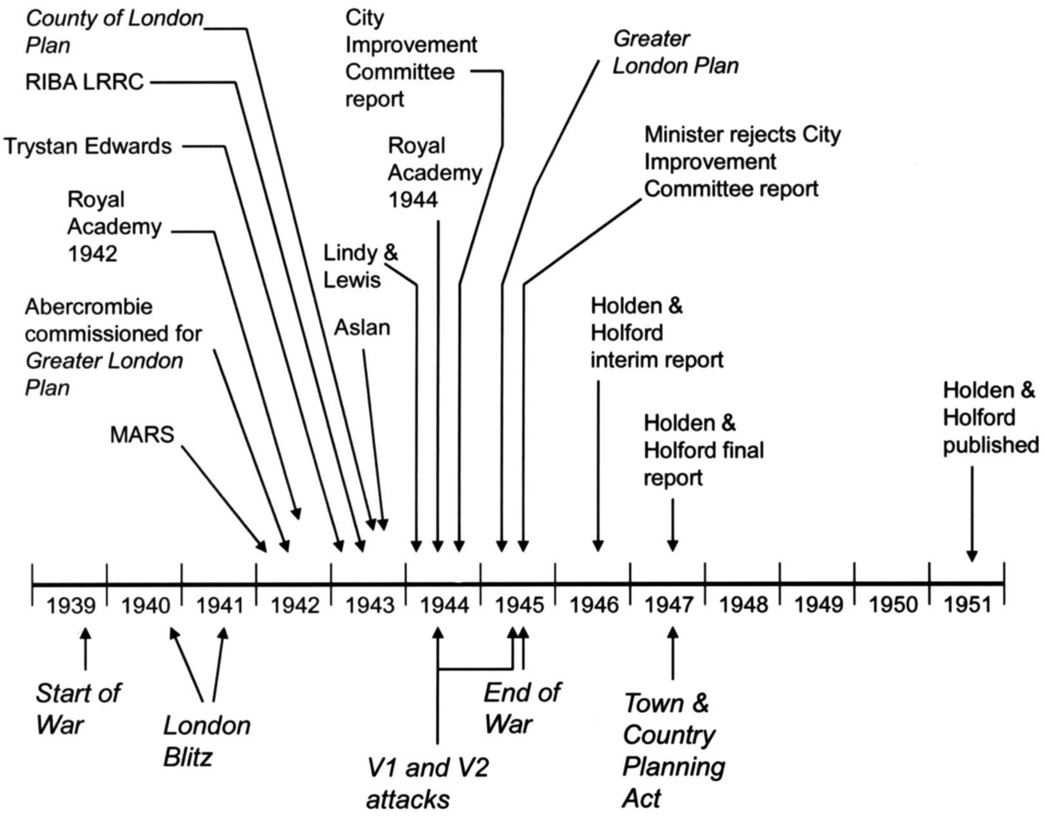
County of London Plan
RIBA LRRC
Trystan Edwards
Royal Academy 1942
Abercrombie commissioned for *Greater London Plan*
MARS
City Improvement Committee report
Royal Academy 1944
Lindy & Lewis
Aslan
Greater London Plan
Minister rejects City Improvement Committee report
Holden & Holford interim report
Holden & Holford final report
Holden & Holford published
1939
1940
1941
1942
1943
1944
1945
1946
1947
1948
1949
1950
1951
Start of War
London Blitz
V1 and V2 attacks
End of War
Town & Country Planning Act

Figure 1. Schematic representation of clustering of London-related planning activity.

In working through the design and implementation of post-Second World War reconstruction plans for London, the challenge is to examine the touch points between professional authority, official planning discourse and human agency involved with the product and process of plan design and implementation. Work around urban assemblages in parts of the social sciences is helpful insofar as it places particular emphasis on the power relationships inherent in networks of human and non-human interactions that occur across certain times and spaces.[14] This generates opportunities for analysing the implementation of reconstruction plans 'in the making', fused together in the processes of variable duration and impact.[15] It adds tone to the general argument that reconstruction was the result of a one-directional imposition of top-down local authority-supported masterplans crafted at the vanguard of high modernism by eminent male architect-planners, and subsequently embraced by enthusiastic public and private sector actors keen to implement sweeping change.[16] Investigating these issues remain an important task, given that the interplay between actors across time and space not only influenced the design, layout and used of the post-war physical fabric, but these interactions also inform contemporary understandings of how the city should be planned and experienced.

This coming together of diverse urban forms shares similarities with actor-network theory, in that actors, including human and non-human entities, 'such as models, maps and plans, can contribute to the transfer of information and the exercise of power'.[17] These constellations can assemble into associations that, albeit temporarily, constitute a composite.[18] In this sense, the following analysis of the wartime and post-war replanning of London provides a more grounded investigation into the way that power was negotiated between different actors and across spatial scales;

hence agency is not irrevocably shaped by the authority of well-known lead actor/s, and/or embedded within a ‘totalising plan’.[19] The approach taken here connects and responds to recent suggestions for a more human-centred and contextualized application of urban assemblage thinking.[20] This involves an uncovering of structure and agency, while also recognizing the political, economic and social realities of the replanning of London. Moreover, inspired by recent efforts to track the interactions associated with different planning actors and practices coming together in a post-war context, this paper examines the assembling authority of power brokers,[21] and ‘circulating modes of expertise and local embeddedness’ operating between different scales.[22] In so doing, this opens up important questions regarding the changing nature of who designs, who delivers and who benefits in this interpretation of the production and consumption of urban space.

The concepts of cultural authority and cultural mapping are also useful in relation to the concept and processes of town planning ‐ the development, writing / drawing, and communication of a ‘plan’ ‐ particularly in the complex and contested case of a national capital in the aftermath of a total war. Authority in a culture can be individual, corporate and political: it is often contested and controversial. Its use here derives from the history of science, where ‘expertise’ and ‘professionalism’ have been rejected in favour of more contextual explorations of personal credibility and the relationships between knowledge producers and communities.[23] This also raises the issues of trust and credibility, and thus how scientific innovations and information are received and acted upon.[24] Yet studies in the history of science have tended to focus more on scientific and public audiences and less on institutional ones,[25] with the notable exception of a study of the British admiralty and naval architecture.[26] Cultural cartography has been used to understand boundary disputes in science, particularly in terms of a conceptual mapping of authority.[27] Examining what claims are made, by whom, and how are they received demonstrates how cultural authority is claimed and contested.[28] These ideas can be readily applied to mid-century town planning, where the dominant discourse has been one of growing professionalism.[29] Although generating a large literature,[30] reconstruction planning has been little theorized with the exception of one application of actor-network theory to a plan and its production.[31]

Authority, hierarchy and plans for London

Authority is evident in most of these plans, from the top down (Minister and many civil servants) but also in the ‘expertise’ of the professional planners involved – particularly Abercrombie, with his wide academic and practice experience. Yet the stories of some plans show little authority. ‘Trust’ is more complex, particularly as town planning was relatively new: but it is clear that the Ministry had little trust in local authority staff and even their clear favourite consultant, Abercrombie, also generated some acerbic comments.

In a hierarchy of plans the London County and Greater London plans stand out, but even formally there was competition between the much-criticized plan of the City of London’s Improvements and Town Planning Committee, and the replacement by consultants Holden and Holford. Even locally, there were Borough and smaller-scale formal plans, and some much less formal, by individuals and local groups. The City itself attracted many informal proposals, as well as the quasi-official proposals[32] of the Royal Academy. The larger-scale MARS (Modern Architectural Research Group) plan was of equally problematic status.

One problem with exploring the plans as a hierarchy rather than a chronology is that there was no structural (ie hierarchical) logic in their timing. Plans were commissioned, delivered and commented upon in no logical order; in fact the highest in the hierarchy, the regional plan to which logically all others should be subordinate, was one of the last to appear. This is one of the greatest problems in dealing with London's replanning, and is largely a function of the gradual evolution of historical boundaries and responsibilities coupled with some clear reluctance on the part of various individuals and authorities to coordinate and collaborate.

Greater London Plan

In planning historiography, Patrick Abercrombie's ideas for the refashioning of London are most prominent for their investment in zoning principles and for their grand plans to remove over a million Londoners from the dreary and overcrowded city, largely into eight new satellite towns to be built beyond the Green Belt.[33] The *Greater London Plan* was planning on the grand scale. It was called 'perhaps the most colossal work of planning of all time'.[34] This was a Ministry commission, this being desired by the County authorities as this would 'take the matter out of the range of local politics'.[35] Abercrombie was the prime author.

Here we see significant problems, not least over Abercrombie's identification and appointment. At least one influential local individual complained over the perceived preferential treatment of this key individual, noting that there were other consultants, himself amongst them: 'Abercrombie is not the only planning expert'.[36] There was demonstrably a clear preference in the Ministry for Abercrombie: he was promoted by the Ministry to the Standing Conference on London Regional Planning, which agreed in May 1942 to appoint a consultant 'who might well be Professor Abercrombie'.[37]

Abercrombie proposed to start work in August 1942 with completion 'within the year'.[38] The plan was circulated in 1944 and published in 1945. Although the entire Plan was produced quickly, and with input from the Standing Conference and the affected local authorities, there was little unanimity in their responses. One of its key features was its heavy reliance on accurate data collection and presentation: this was a relatively new, technocentric, planning approach. The plan's fundamental concerns were to control the haphazard growth of the capital city, to introduce a measure of decentralization via satellite towns, and to introduce controlled development of housing, industry and communications.

Industrial location was felt to be 'in some respects the most important part of the plan'.[39] It followed the recommendations of the Barlow Report,[40] assuming that new industry would not be permitted to locate in London, and that 'the pre-war drift from the depressed areas and other places of low prosperity to South-East England and London [would] not be permitted to continue'.[41] It begins to explicitly suggest a distance-decay factor in metropolitan influence and planning. More significantly, perhaps, in terms of the transferability of planning ideas, here we see the emergence of new towns and a more coherent green belt.

But there was criticism from the Ministry, which felt that Abercrombie's text was incomplete and inappropriate; the whole thing was inadequate for publication.[42] In exploring wider responses to potential implementation of the plan, it is interesting to note a Ministry comment that in some towns the 'individual ambitions of Council Officials or one or two forceful [elected] members' were pushing the growth of those towns as extensively as possible, and 'it is very essential that a curb should be put, by the Regional Authority for London, on this approach to town planning'.[43]

MARS 1942 plan

The MARS plan, by contrast, was for a wholly radical restructuring of the city and region.[44] Thought-provoking but wholly impractical, it was developed as the culmination of the Group's interest in London. Its principal publication was as a 10,000-word 'description and analysis' in the *Architectural Review*[45] and a public exhibition: the full plan was never published. It was accepted by MARS on the basis that 'we fight for an *urban* feeling, not a suburban', and that it was exploratory and not for formal submission to the LCC.[46] In terms of the 'authority' of its small number of members at the time, this was limited.[47]

As with the *Greater London Plan*, the published report drew heavily on data and statistical analysis and it could be reasonably argued that there was a technical planning basis as much as a modernist doctrine underlying the proposals. The plan envisaged that the historic core should remain (thus retaining its functions), although more radically, it proposed an extended linear east–west spine and lateral extensions serving as 'Districts' (smaller-scale linear cities) for a total proposed population of ten million. The plan's comb-like linear structure prioritized rail transport rather than road; reorganized industrial location; and suggested a hierarchy of social units. In fact, the published documentation (the full content of the exhibition boards is unknown) arguably eschews any direct correlation with the layout of the city it sought to represent; instead, it focused on movement and communication rather than the complexities of urban form, structure and design.[48] Despite this exercise in spatial abstraction, the plan's two principal authors, Korn and Samuely, seem to have believed in its practicality as a solution for reconstruction,[49] but few others, even amongst MARS members, did. The *Architect's Journal* suggested that the proposed transportation infrastructure was inefficient and insufficient: although it could facilitate greater speed, it would face problems with peak period congestion.[50] Samuely produced a robust defence of the plan, although he weakened his technical approach by stating his 'belief that the people of London preferred to live in a town planned as a working one and not "to suit the idiosyncrasies of two or three hundred who love one place or another so much"'.[51] Clearly this was written before the rise of the conservation movement.

Perhaps the plan's importance lies in its culmination of the promotion of a new form of residential layout: the 'neighbourhood unit'. This can be seen influencing the housing and social concerns of many other plans even at the strategic/regional level. Even so, and even for residential districts, its land-use planning has been described as 'perfunctory'.[52] It has nevertheless been suggested that this plan 'summed up, as no other plan did anywhere in the world at that time, the whole nature of the CIAM approach to the hierarchical structure for a city'.[53] But, however helpful in developing thinking, this was not a practical plan.

Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) London Regional Reconstruction Committee plan

This was a further unofficial large-scale plan. In 1941 RIBA constituted a London Regional Reconstruction Committee (LRRC) to advise on region-wide reconstruction planning. It first sought views from RIBA branches and members, although with little result. The task then fell to the committee itself, which was large and also represented the interests of the Architectural Association. Abercrombie was also evidently involved, as 'an increasingly important source of information … he appears to have influenced the committee's proposals, though without dominating or directing them'.[54] The proposals, described as interim, were published in a small booklet and promoted via an exhibit in a regional planning exhibition at the National Gallery in 1943.[55]

The LRRC plan explicitly identified seven factors necessary before replanning could be implemented. These formed a significant conceptual contribution and distinguish this from most other plans for the metropolis. Perhaps of greatest significance was the call for the constitution of essential machinery for a national plan; and, unlike the abstract conceptualisations of the MARS plan, it called for the satisfaction of human needs as a foundation for reconstruction. The plan covered four main elements: communications, the reconstitution of urban areas, industrial location, and the preservation of historical features and natural character. Trunk roads, railways and green open space would separate urban areas, which would be self-contained. Industry would be segregated from residential and urban areas, and linked to the transportation system. The preservation of natural and historical features was seen as an integral part of planning, and some improvements, including slum clearance, were emphasized. Yet, despite this strategic perspective, consideration was given to micro-scale design, for example of trunk road interchanges.[56]

However, it was clear by 1943 that the LRRC lacked the detailed data and analysis necessary for turning a realistic set of ideas into an implementable plan. The LRRC plan was therefore produced in a seemingly *ad hoc* manner, small in format and short, with crudely-drawn maps and diagrams.[57] It may have been produced by experts but did not communicate expertise. As published it focused on transport and communications, but many of the planning details were, perhaps understandably, vague and underdeveloped. The published report noted that it was merely a draft for a master-plan. But it did not explicitly acknowledge the faster-developing work being done elsewhere; although it shows awareness of the links with 'attitude of mind', legislation etc, it was vague and shapeless. In fact, a fundamental criticism of the plan as displayed was that its terms of reference were too narrow, particularly in terms of the areal extent of coverage.[58]

A plan for 'Greater London'

A further, and again wholly unofficial, plan for 'Greater London' was produced apparently by the architect A. Trystan Edwards.[59] It was a self-proclaimed 'master plan' and made no attempt to plan any part of the city or region in any detail. It was explicitly aligned to the 'national plan' debate; but not specifically to any recently-promoted national plans, rather to a loose framework produced by the Hundred New Towns Association and its 'technique of mass migration' hoping to reduce the Greater London population by two million, dispersed to 40 new towns. It referred to the Royal Academy plan (the only one then published) only in the sense that it, or another plan for the central area, 'might be incorporated in it'.

In terms of contributing to the London planning debate perhaps this plan's unique contribution is its explicit division of London into two regions; the 'conservative' and the 'radical'. Historic London formed the 'conservative' element: 'much of which should be treated with reverence, and as far as possible preserved'. This was identified as an 8 × 5.5 mile rectangle. 'Radical' replanning would be allowed everywhere else; 'we need not scruple here to undertake a very large programme of demolition and replacement'. This would focus development into four wedges, separated by four green wedges, as an alternative to a green belt, in order to give rapid and direct access to countryside. Despite the feature in a major professional journal, the plan vanished without trace, as was so often the fate of these unofficial, unsolicited proposals.

County of London Plan

Nestling within the spatial structure and theoretical construct of the *Greater London Plan*, and by the same main author but originating slightly earlier and so not genuinely part of a hierarchical structure, was the *County of London Plan*. For this, Abercrombie was appointed by the LCC to work with its Architect and Planning Officer, J.H. Forshaw. By February 1942 Abercrombie felt that he ‘had really done his part’ although much discussion ‘would have to be endured’ before the LCC would approve the plan.[60]

There were comparisons between the two plans, yet the *County of London Plan* appears to be clearly dominant not just for its statistical base and its more sophisticated and better-articulated theoretical underpinnings. In particular, the problems identified and addressed by the Plan included:

- traffic congestion, causing waste of time and loss of life
- ‘depressed housing’, a generalized view of poor conditions in the bulk of inner London’s housing
- Inadequacy of open space provision
- environmental problems caused by mixing of housing and industry, and
- destruction of countryside caused by continuing urban sprawl.

The latter problem was too large for this plan to address comprehensively, and its handling of this through decentralization was also criticized.[61]

The plan was dominated by concepts of London as a community, a metropolis and a machine.[62] One of the key novelties here was the concept and diagrammatic representation of ‘social and functional areas’ – this is the community aspect. Known irreverently to civil servants as the ‘egg diagram’ the key graphic representation of this concept came rather late in the proceedings, disrupting publication and exhibition.[63] Some of these between-spaces could be conceptualized as linear green spaces, having – on a much smaller scale – similar features as the regional green belt; such linear spaces were indeed suggested in the *Greater London Plan*. London as metropolis recognized the national and international functions of the city, including the business/finance centre of the City and the manufacturing, trading and cultural significance. Yet some were localized functions, including Westminster, the law courts and the university: the plan suggested that these functional zones should be treated as separate ‘precincts’: through traffic was excluded from the precincts, leaving them ‘inward looking and separate from the city outside’.[64] London as machine focused on transport, especially the proposed three ring roads.

The Plan was published and rapidly reprinted in 1943 and 1944, and an exhibition was held at County Hall in July-August 1943, where it was visited by 54,732[65] including the King and Queen, then moved to the Royal Academy in Piccadilly. It was widely reviewed.

It could be argued that the *County of London Plan* was widely perceived less as a strategic overview than as a series of detailed micro-scale proposals that happened to be presented at county scale. This can be seen by the Plan’s depiction of, for example, major road junction designs and even designs for individual urban quarters or ‘precincts’.

City of London plans (1) Improvements and Town Planning Committee

The lowest level in the plan hierarchy spatially, and in terms of strategic thinking, was of individual boroughs and, particularly, the City of London itself. The City was the focus of greatest concentrated damage. Attempts had been made to suggest an external consultant,[66] but the City Corporation instead first produced a report principally by F.J. Forty, the City Engineer, on behalf of the Improvements and Town Planning Committee. There was Ministry concern that the City had not discussed matters with Abercrombie, and had ceased communication with Sir Giles Scott, then working on a plan for St Paul’s for the Royal Academy: ‘this is another indication that the City wishes to be left to mind its own business’.[67]

On 9 December 1942 Ministry staff visited Forty to see the draft plan, and highlighted their concerns in characteristically forthright terms. 'We are not only disappointed, we are frankly alarmed. Never since 1666 has there been such an opportunity to replan parts of the City, and, if the plans we saw are adopted, this opportunity will once again be missed. Indeed, it will be more than missed, it will be deliberately passed by'.[68] Both now and subsequently, such memos make reference to the fact that Forty was not a planner but an engineer; an interesting point in the professional battle over where the expertise and responsibility for such planning should lie.

The Corporation insisted to the Minister that it was too late to appoint a consultant, and their plan was to be published in response to public pressure.[69] However publication was repeatedly deferred 'in the best interests of the Corporation and of the City in its future', causing adverse comment.[70] The published plan[71] was illustrated by the best architectural illustrators of the period, and was accompanied by an exhibition.[72]

Virtually all reviewers heavily criticized the plan as being overly cautious, traditional and short-sighted. 'There is no such nonsense in it as vision, or adventure. The attitude obviously was how business can be brought back into the nearest equivalent of its old quarters without loss of ground rent to anybody'.[73] In more measured tones, this was 'a plan of orderly redevelopment, which shows a marked tendency to rebuild along the old lines'.[74] The Ministry staff were particularly scathing and, as usual, passed up no opportunity to extol the virtues of Abercrombie, their favourite planner.

A key concern was that the plan proposed rebuilding, as far as possible, along pre-war lines. The control of the bulk of new buildings would be via limiting the proportion of the site to be built upon, and the height. In terms of promoting the redevelopment, the Corporation was disinclined to pursue the new powers available under the 1944 Town and Country Planning Act, of large-scale site assembly through compulsory purchase. The Ministry felt that this was 'waiting for developers to shape the City instead of planning for them'.[75]

The Minister refused to approve the plan and again strongly recommended appointment of a consultant, rather than the City Engineer.[76] The City authorities unsurprisingly took offence at this. They were reluctant to appoint any consultant, let alone to commission an entirely new plan; and, the Ministry felt, the City was reluctant, if not refusing, to make use of the expanded planning powers of the 1944 Act.[77] There were delays within the Ministry in responding to this problem and Ministerial-level action was suggested. The then Minister, Silkin, stood firm in emphasizing the need for some response, and eventually the Ministry's preferred consultants, the architect Charles Holden and the Ministry planner William Holford, were appointed.[78]

City of London plans (2): Holden and Holford

Both Holden and Holford were Commissioners of the Royal Fine Arts Commission and were clearly aware of the perceived shortcomings of the City Engineer's plan. Holden, a senior and respected architect, had sufficient reputation to placate the City, but little planning experience although he was a member of the Town Planning Institute (TPI).[79] He played a relatively small role in the London plan, focusing particularly on the architectural setting of St Paul's. The wider planning expertise was supplied by Holford and a small team.

Their Interim Report focused on issues of broad principle. In part it disagreed with Abercrombie's decentralization proposals or, at best, did not suggest that the City contribute to them: office floorspace would instead remain at more or less its pre-war level. Nor were its traffic proposals radical either, although one new north–south route was aligned west of the Guildhall, utilizing an area of very severe damage. It was thought inevitable that some building area would be lost to traffic schemes to relieve congestion. The principle of reconstruction ‘should not be one of general expansion, but of balance between the increase due to greater efficiency of building, and the reductions necessary to secure efficiency of lay-out and circulation’.[80]

There were critical comments of the Interim Report and, as always, major revisions were undertaken. The roads were held not to be able to cope with suggested volumes of traffic, retention of the central markets necessitated unduly expensive highway engineering,[81] and the City’s Improvements and Town Planning Committee felt unable to approve some road proposals.[82] But there was strong professional support from, for example, Professor Sir Charles Reilly and *The Times*.[83]

The final report was presented in 1947 and was a refinement with detailed proposals rather than a further rewrite.[84] It has been described as neither radical nor visionary.[85] However, the critical response was largely positive. The plan gave owners and developers some certainty; its timing, just after the Town and Country Planning Bill, brought yet more certainty. The plan clearly stated rebuilding targets after 10 and 30 years. Density control was significant, a ‘standard plot ratio’ of 5:1 being established.

The report was accepted by the Corporation, with the Minister writing that ‘the plan would prove a reliable framework’ for the future.[86] However, following the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act the planning system had changed, and the Holden/Holford plan could not be seen as independent of wider London planning. Although modified still further, recognizable elements of the plan were incorporated into the London County Development Plan,[87] and it was only then that the 1947 report, greatly extended with material on the nature and extent of the destruction, was published for public consumption.[88]

City of London plans (3) Royal Academy (RA)

At a much less formal level, but still largely at the City scale, the same formal, traditional *beaux-arts* approach is seen in the two plans from the RA.[89] These dealt principally with traffic: the plan is much less ambitious than its wide-ranging title suggests. The RA team was led by Sir Edwin Lutyens; Abercrombie was a member. Its remit was ‘to consider and plan a scheme for the architectural development of London’, preserving its essential character.[90] The engineer Sir Charles Bressey was also a member, and clearly the proposals developed from the 1937 Bressey/Lutyens report.[91] The proposals were exhibited at the RA in October 1942, and a version of the report was published by Country Life Ltd. In this published version Lutyens clearly stated that ‘he Committee has not attempted a town-planning scheme in the technical sense’.[92]

The proposals focused on roads and junctions; the road layout was *beaux-arts* and the architectural treatments were traditional and classical – albeit illustrated with arcaded frontages over pavements, and set-back upper storeys. Particular consideration was to be given, before detailed design and implementation, to building lines, junction design, scale and skyline. Open space provision should ensure that all London residents and users should be within ten minutes’ walk of such facilities. Car parking was discussed, and there were suggestions for pedestrianizing streets. These were drawn together by a dominant ring road around the central area, a clear descendant of the original Bressey/Lutyens plan.

Despite Lutyens’s emphasis on these ‘points of major interest’, the plan received overwhelming criticism in the professional press – although some support in the popular press. One of main criticisms centred on how the plan had been designed in disconnected pieces; for example, the terminus rail stations were to be moved to meet the new ring road.[93] While the term ‘*beaux-arts*’ was accurately used to describe the plan, it was used pejoratively; and it was officially suggested that, notwithstanding the original remit, the proposals did not take account of the City's character.[94] An otherwise measured critic wrote that this 'introduces a symmetry of layout, as well as design of buildings, which is very foreign to Britain and has resulted in the coining of a word by its opponents – "vistamongering"'.[95] The critical reception focused on style more than substance; for example on the formal layout around St Paul's and the new processional way from Victoria Station to Buckingham Palace.

Revised plans and models were exhibited at the RA Summer Exhibition in 1943. A further revised version was exhibited and published in 1944. The architect Sir Giles Gilbert Scott noted that attention since the 1942 report had moved from 'a general aesthetic approach' to 'the practical details of one of the most important features of any town plan – communications'.[96] Ring roads and major 'sub-arterial' roads were proposed, usually with large-scale geometric roundabout junctions. Some of the latter were so large that shopping centres were planned within them. Nevertheless the *beaux-arts* flavour remained with, for example, St Paul's Cathedral being closely hemmed in by 3-storey Classically-detailed blocks.

Although this document was more favourably reviewed than its predecessor, there were far fewer reviews. Perhaps the time had passed; more likely the bulk of attention had been diverted by other plans for London, presenting a more holistic vision than the micro-scale roundabouts that this 1944 plan appeared to focus upon.

City of London plans (4): less formal

More unofficially-sanctioned still is the raft of plans by individuals, local groups and so on, most usually for very localized areas within the City. These were of very variable quality, though where illustrations survive it is clear that they, too, were dominated by formal *beaux-arts* treatments. The exhibition by the architects Lindy and Lewis is an example. Their plan was publicly exhibited in early 1944 at the Incorporated Association of Architects and Surveyors.[97] It showed no hard evidence of detailed factual survey or technical research, and hence was vague about issues such as building height even where building masses were depicted adjacent to retained existing structures. The proposals illustrated fall principally into the *beaux-arts* formulae of avenues and axes, with St Paul's surrounded by a colonnaded ellipse, an axis to the Bank crossing where there is a fan-shaped layout, and so on. It was quite widely, but critically, reviewed.

The architect and structural engineer Harold Baily also produced proposals in 1944.[98] Also using *beaux-arts* principles, he placed St Paul's in formal gardens surrounded by a uniform arc of office blocks to the height of the cathedral's cornice; there were more axial roads and vistas, and a ring road surrounding the central area. 'Properly planned junctions connect main streets, so as to abolish traffic lights and eliminate traffic jams'. The plans were presented without comment in *The Builder* and vanished without trace. However, if this is the 'Mr Bailey' of the London Regional Offices of the Ministry of Home Security, the plans were seen in early 1943 by a senior Ministry officer, who reported that 'though in parts [they] are rather amateurish and mistaken the proposals had yet more vision than those of the City Engineer'.[99]

The seriousness of some of these informal proposals must be questioned: for Lindy and Lewis, for example, gaining considerable professional and mass media coverage with an exhibition may have been more for reasons of self-publicity and career promotion than with any serious hope of influencing planning. They may have had architectural expertise but were not planners, and had little authority. Their exhibition of proposals received wide professional coverage, but again most of it critical. It provided spectacular settings but nevertheless ‘entirely fails to realize the city’s essential characteristics’. The *Architect’s Journal* suggested that those who wished to devote their spare time, enthusiasm and talents to replanning should be ‘helping with the necessary groundwork of surveys by joining collective planning groups whose work is based on essential and thorough research’.[100] It seems to be the case that the lure of replanning London was irresistible for some individuals, who perhaps felt that this was an easy way to promote their own careers at a crucial period. But the negative reception of such proposals meant that such initiatives backfired.

Overview: authority, planners and planning

This study of replanning one city/conurbation in one brief, although hectic, period usefully demonstrates the concept of ‘authority’ at that time, particularly in terms of the shifting concept and emerging profession of town planning. In exploring the range of reconstruction planning for London it is difficult not, though invidious, to focus on one individual. Patrick Abercrombie, knighted in 1947 for his contributions to planning amongst which the Greater London and County of London Plans are prominent, is inevitably a major figure. An unpublished autobiography scarcely covers this period.[101] There is no definitive biography, although something is known of the development of his ideas and approaches and there is a short overview of his career.[102] Yet, in the absence of a detailed and definitive biographical study, we have to question the nature and extent of his personal input to these plans. It should also be remembered that at this time he was busy but ageing; he only ran a very small office, and had to coordinate new seconded and temporary staff for these large commissions. He seems to have had a great facility for strategic overview, seen in his other large-scale regional plans commissioned by the Ministry. There is little trace of his workings in archives; National Archive files on the *Greater London Plan* are procedural and relatively uninformative.[103]

The prominence of Abercrombie, and other key consultants, at the time and since, has tended to devalue the direct contribution of co-authors such as J.H. Forshaw, co-author of the *County of London Plan*. Nevertheless Forshaw was a significant contributor, and professionally influential: being then the LCC Architect, and between 1846 and 1959 Chief Architect to the Ministry of Health and then Ministry of Housing and Local Government. That he was a Liverpool graduate and thus a former pupil of Abercrombie’s provides another valuable perspective on the working arrangements between the two men.[104] In a similar vein, much more is known of Holford than his co-author of the City of London plan, Holden.[105] Nevertheless, Holford’s influence within the wartime Ministry, and his later elevation (knighted in 1953 and raised to a life peerage in 1965), ensured his pre-eminence. Notwithstanding the high-profile figures such as Abercrombie and Holford, and the many others who produced both formal and informal plans for London, it is easy to see why Myerscough-Walker was suspicious of the whole enterprise and of what he saw as ‘a new class who see Town Planning and Reconstruction as a profitable future’.[106] Planning was becoming more scientific, more data-driven; and indeed, Abercrombie described planners as ‘technicians’.[107] This can be seen in the data-laden tables and appendices of the larger plans.[108] The ‘art’ of town planning,[109] especially as related to the *beaux-arts* geometric plans, was falling from favour.

A first consideration of ‘authority’ was the power brokers. For the first time, the new wartime Ministry and its Minister were exerting significant influence, seen with the Minister’s pressure on the City Corporation to ‘forge alliances’ and create assemblages of power by appointing consultants, and the Ministry’s critical comments and eventually its more formulaic approach to planning driven by the 1947 Act. Their favouring of Abercrombie is a particular feature. Local authorities might be thought to be key power brokers especially in the appointment of consultants; but this was a negotiated process, and a distributed application of agency and planning authority,[110] as they often sought advice from RIBA and TPI on this. Nationally a minority (though a large one) of plans were produced by consultants, so this authority was limited.

A second consideration of authority is the influence of 'lead actors', defined here as plan authors. This influence depends partly on local chains of authority (e.g. between consultant, local professionals and politicians, and eventually the Ministry) but also, to a significant extent, on their personal credibility. Baily, Lindy and Lewis had relatively little personal credibility. Trystan Edwards was a prolific commentator on planning and architecture, but this probably produced more professional than public credibility. While the Royal Academy used some prominent contributors, its plans had limited focus and their publisher, *Country Life*, had a very restricted readership. Abercrombie was much better known, to professionals, politicians and the public. He had, of course, trained many architects and planners, some now senior practitioners. The popular propaganda film about the Plymouth plan featured Abercrombie as 'the professor', a very Establishment authority figure, which boosted his public profile.[111]

Conclusions

London was a valuable proving-ground for circulation of professional concepts of planning, and the communication of planning ideas, at this time. Its scale and variety allowed, indeed made necessary, the testing of ideas and practice generated among an array of professional and lay sources, and from the smallest-scale local to the widest regional context. What was also an issue – for some – is the way in which Abercrombie dominated London's replanning. Clearly, he was being heavily pushed by the Ministry – or some within its higher echelons at least. 'His' plans and representations as 'an iconic feat of town planning'[112] are still cited, and arguably misunderstood; creating an enduring influence even in recent years, while also shaping contemporary interpretations of how 'best' to plan the capital.[113] To be recommended for all three layers in the hierarchy of scale, and actually commissioned for two of them, is surprising. He was also involved in the Royal Academy plan preparation committee. Yet Abercrombie's approaches and plans for London and elsewhere were not without criticism within the Ministry, in memoranda and notes usually (we presume) without his knowledge. This is an interesting perspective on a lead actor, examining the distributed nature of agency, and the assembling processes[114] of planning ideas across different scales and between actors which influenced the reshaping of the city.

Much of this stems from a cumulative process; initial recognition of significant lead actors and the cultural authority underpinning 'their' planning endeavours became contested and/or accepted before being repeated in written record and other discourse, thereby leading to a degree of public and professional acceptance. This is understandable. But, as is demonstrated in the above narrative, the inevitable danger is that this leads to an over-representation and hence misinterpretation. Highlighting the 'brokering practices' of other individuals and the intrinsic power relations distributed across spatial scales and assemblage of planning ideas demonstrates something of how their ideas became downplayed. Focusing on Abercrombie tends to obscure the fact that other actors, and in particular the public, had virtually no input. Publications and exhibitions, although popular, were top-down means of information rather than planning consultation. These processes driven by expert 'knowledge producers' – however credible – side-stepped the local knowledge and experience of residents.

Planning philosophy and technique were transformed during the Second World War, resulting in the emergence of what has been termed a ‘grand synthesis’, a ‘comprehensive, normative model of urban form’.[115] A new Ministry was formed, a ‘Planning Technique’ section set up to develop techniques and to critique plans; this centralized approach directly and indirectly affected both concepts of planning and the production of plans. However, the resources expended on replanning were subject to critical review, particularly by the Ministry. Its lack of control was regretted, and this is definitely an ‘authority’ issue. The preparation of plans, and particularly the unofficial ones, ‘represents a large expenditure of time and money, largely misdirected. There is nothing to stop anyone preparing plans and presenting them in any way open to them but surely talent of this order ought to be directed *by us* to something more than the stimulation of public interest’.[116] Yet Hobhouse has argued that the unique circumstances of this particular period were the opportunity for reconstruction occasioned by the bomb damage and later facilitated by new legislation; the existence of the London County Council and its skilled staff; and the cooperation of the relevant Government agencies.[117]

While a great deal is known about many of the London post-war reconstruction plans, they have usually been studied individually or as small clusters. Taking a wider view allows for an exploration of the hierarchy of plan making, and how plan production did not match that theoretical hierarchical construct, as it engaged with the messiness of political, economic and social contexts. Using concepts of authority, influence and personal credibility, as revealed in the plans themselves, contemporary reviews and archival documentation, provides a fresh perspective on the complexity of planning processes, including why Abercrombie became so prominent in London’s replanning, and how he was able to achieve so much in an astonishingly short timespan. Yet it also reveals the ‘unevenness’ of postwar replanning,[118] and the tensions in that process, particularly between local and national state actors, as revealed through comments on preserved documents. The replanned London was a success in many ways, and local, national and international planning practice learned much. Yet the rebuilt London was rather a different matter, and the inevitable slowness of much rebuilding, as well as the procedural changes introduced by the 1947 Act, led to a very different public conception of planning.

Notes

1. This extensive literature includes Bullock, “Ideals, Priorities and Harsh Realities”; Foley, *Controlling London’s Growth*; Hasegawa, “Governments, Consultants and Expert Bodies”; Higgott, “A modest Proposal”; Marmaras, *Planning London for the Post-War Era*; Self, “The Evolution of the Greater London Plan”; White, “The ‘Dismemberment of London’”.
2. Johnson-Schlee, “Introduction”.
3. Gold and Ward, *Place Promotion*.
4. Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan*; Forshaw and Abercrombie, *County of London Plan.*
5. Mort, “Fantasies of Metropolitan Life”.
6. Ross et al., “London’s Post-War Reconstruction Plan”.
7. Hornsey, “Everything is Made of Atoms,” 95.
8. Forrest, “Patrick Abercrombie’s ‘The Greater London Plan’,” 2.
9. Paddock, “London Can Still Learn”.
10. Allen, “The Man Who Created London”.
11. Ibid.
12. Marmaras, *Planning London for the Post-War Era*, 1.
13. Saumarez Smith, *Boom Cities.*
14. Anderson and McFarlane, “Assemblage and Geography”; DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society.*

15. DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society.*
16. Adams and Larkham, *The Everyday Experiences of Reconstruction and Regeneration.*
17. Essex and Brayshay, "Vision, Vested Interest and Pragmatism," 418.
18. Anderson and McFarlane, "Assemblage and Geography".
19. Li, "Practices of Assemblage".
20. Anderson and McFarlane, "Assemblage and Geography".
21. Koster and Van Leynseele, "Brokers as Assemblers".
22. Pries and Qviström, "The Patchwork Planning of a Welfare Landscape," 925.
23. Shapin, *A Social History of Truth.*
24. Smith and Scott, "'Trust in Providence'".
25. cf Secord, *Victorian Sensation.*
26. Leggett, *Shaping the Royal Navy.*
27. Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science.*
28. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority.*
29. Cherry, *The Evolution of British Town Planning.*
30. Larkham and Lilley, *Planning the 'City of Tomorrow'*, section 7.2.
31. Essex and Brayshay, "Vision, Vested Interest and Pragmatism".
32. In this paper 'quasi-official' is used because of the standing (ie "authority") of those involved, including Lutyens and Bressey, who had reported on London roads in 1937.
33. Cherry, *Town Planning in Britain since 1900*; Meller, *Towns, Plans and Society*; Ward, *Planning and Urban Change.*
34. Adshead, "*Greater London Plan*," 17.
35. Whiskard to Barlow (Treasury), 14/3/1942, The National Archives (hereafter TNA) HLG 71/116.
36. Alderman E.G. Culpin, Chairman of the Standing Conference on London Regional Planning: Memo, 29/1/1942, TNA HLG 71/116.
37. Memo, Saunders to Pepler, 12/5/1942, TNA HLG 71/116.
38. Abercrombie to Whiskard, 31/7/1942, TNA HLG 71/116.
39. Robson, "The Greater London Plan," 113.
40. Barlow, *Report of the Royal Commission.*
41. Robson, "The Greater London Plan," 113.
42. TNA HLG 79/58; 85/2.
43. Note, Greater London Plan, January 1944, TNA HLG 85/2.
44. Korn and Samuely, "A Master Plan for London". See also Gold, "The MARS Plans for London," 259–63.
45. Korn and Samuely, "A Master Plan for London".
46. RIBA Archives, Ar0/2/10/1/ii, cited in Gold, "The MARS Plans for London," 258.
47. See Gold, "The MARS Plans for London," 245.
48. Marmaras and Sutcliffe, "Planning for Post-War London," 434.
49. Gold, "The MARS Plans for London," 263.
50. *Architect's Journal* (1942).
51. Samuely, "The MARS Plan," 55.
52. Marmaras and Sutcliffe, "Planning for Post-War London," 435.
53. Sharp, *A Visual History*, 155.
54. Marmaras and Sutcliffe, "Planning for Post-War London," 444.
55. Larkham, "Exhibiting Planning in Wartime Britain".
56. LRRC, *Greater London: Towards a Master Plan*, 20.
57. Larkham, "Exhibiting Planning in Wartime Britain," based on the survival of a set of photographs of the exhibition boards.
58. *Architect and Building News*, "Post-War London," 117.
59. Edwards, "A Plan for 'Greater London'".
60. Memo to Vincent on meeting of 4/2/1942, TNA HLG 71/116.
61. *Estates Gazette*, "*County of London Plan* Criticised".
62. Stamp, "Replanning London," 666.
63. Memo, Stewart to Tallents, 8 /2/1945, TNA HLG 104/3.
64. Higgott, *Mediating Modernism*, 72.

65. *The Builder*, news item on *County of London* Plan exhibition, 206; Amati and Freestone, "All of London's a Stage".
66. Hasegawa, "Governments, Consultants and Expert Bodies," note 41; several were later identified by Beaufoy: memo, 12/1/1944, TNA HLG 79/973.
67. Memo to Vincent, 26/9/1941, TNA HLG 71/116.
68. Memo to Pepler, 12/1942, TNA HLG 769/973.
69. Beaufoy to Whiskard, 30/8/1945, TNA HLG 79/316.
70. *Estates Gazette*, "City of London Plan".
71. Improvements and Town Planning Committee, *Report on the Preliminary Proposals.*
72. Corporation of London, *Report, Special Committee.*
73. *Architectural Review*, "Marginalia: Patched-up City," li.
74. Stamp, "Replanning London," 665.
75. J.F. Figgis, 12/4/1945, TNA HLG 79/316.
76. Letter, Whiskard to the Town Clerk, 25/7/45, TNA HLG 79/316.
77. Neal to Whiskard, 30/4/1945, TNA HLG 79/316.
78. Hasegawa, "Governments, Consultants and Expert Bodies," 131–2.
79. Suggested by Cherry and Penny, *Holford*, 136.
80. Holden and Holford, *Interim Report*, paras 10–11.
81. *Roads and Road Construction*, Editorial article, 284; *Manchester Guardian*, commentary on the *Interim Report.*
82. P.C.L., "Re-planning the City of London," 198.
83. Reilly, commentary on the *Interim Report*; *The Times*, Editorial comment on the *Interim Report.*
84. Holden and Holford, *Reconstruction in the City of London.*
85. Karol, *Charles Holden Architect*, 460.
86. Silkin, quoted in *The Times*, Report on *Reconstruction in the City of London.*
87. LCC, *London County Development Plan.*
88. Holden and Holford, *The City of London.*
89. Royal Academy, *London Replanned*; *Road, Rail and River in London.*
90. Royal Academy, *London Replanned.*
91. Bressey and Lutyens, *Highway Development Survey.*
92. Royal Academy, *London Replanned*, Foreword.
93. Aslan, "Critique," 267.
94. Beaufoy to Pepler, 18/2/1943, TNA HLG 71/117.
95. Stamp, "Replanning London," 665.
96. Royal Academy, *Road, Rail and River in London*, Foreword.
97. *The Builder*, "A City of London Sketch Plan".
98. *The Builder*, "A Plan for the City of London".
99. Beaufoy to Pepler, 18/2/1943, TNA HLG 71/117.
100. *Architect's Journal,* "Planning After Hours," 220.
101. Abercrombie, Memoir.
102. Dehaene, "Urban Lessons"; "A Conservative Framework"; Dix, "Patrick Abercrombie".
103. TNA HLG 79/228; 79/287.
104. Sharples et al., *Charles Reilly,* 170.
105. Cherry and Penny, *Holford*; Karol, *Charles Holden Architect.*
106. Myerscough-Walker, "Rebuilding Britain," 195.
107. Abercrombie, Discussion, 329, and several other publications.
108. For example, "Once the figures were called 'statistics', they acquired the authority and sanctity of Holy Writ": Devons, *Planning in Practice*, 155.
109. The Royal Town Planning Institute's Royal Charter, 1959, makes reference to "the science and art of planning".
110. Anderson and MacFarlane, "Assemblage and Geography".
111. Craigie, "The Way We Live".
112. Johnson-Schlee, "Introduction".
113. See Allen, "The Man who Created London"; Hall, *Abercrombie's Plan*; *Keith*, "Daring to Plan?" 56.

114. Anderson and McFarlane, "Assemblage and Geography".
115. Cherry and Penny, *Holford*, 128.
116. Beaufoy to Pepler, 18/2/1943, TNA HLG 71/117.
117. Hobhouse, "The First Real Move to a Planning of London," 21.
118. Pries and Qviström, "The Patchwork Planning of a Welfare Landscape".

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