

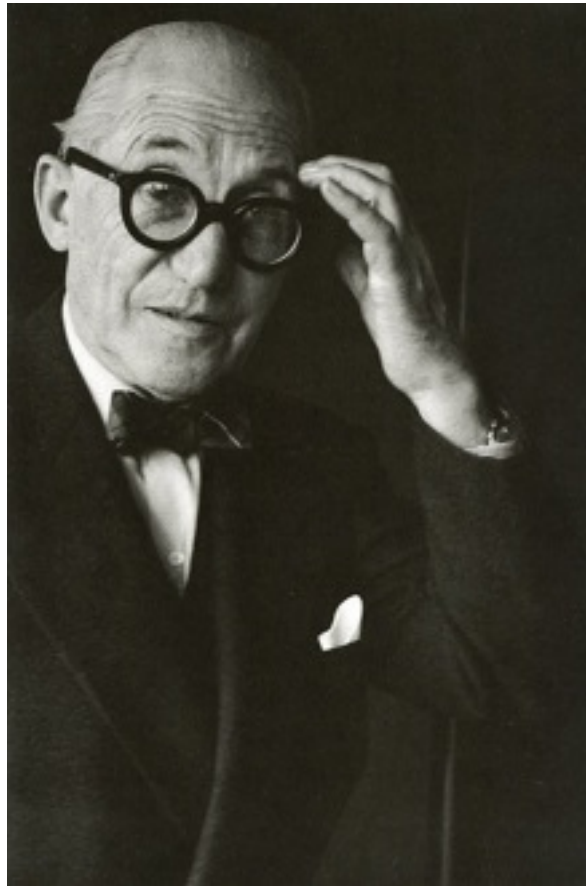


College of Engineering
Department of Architecture & Urban Planning

ARCT 421

Introduction to Urban Design and Planning

A Contemporary City



By: Le Corbusier

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Table of Contents

<u>Introduction</u>	1
<u>Context</u>	
About the Author	1-2
<u>Planning Concept</u>	2-5
<u>Relevance to the City of Doha</u>	6-7
<u>Conclusion</u>	8
<u>Bibliography, References</u>	9

Introduction

Urban planning is a process of designing for the people and using the spaces as efficiently as possible. It is affected by many factors like political, cultural, environmental, social and economical. Town planning helps guiding and ensuring the development of the settlements and communities. Many architects studied cities and became familiar with people's behaviours and tried to design a city that is responding to the people and their needs. This paper will discuss the Contemporary city which was designed by the architect Le Corbusier.

Context

Painter, Architect, City Planner, Philosopher and Author, Le Corbusier (1887-1965) was one of the founding fathers of the Modernist movement. Born in 1887, Charles-Edouard Jeanneret-Gris grew up in the Swiss town of La Chaux-de-Fonds. He was a passionate reader, a keen observer, and along the years he became an enthusiastic traveller. Le Corbusier moved to Paris to pursue a career in Art and Architecture. His career spanned five decades, with his monumental buildings throughout Europe, America & India. As he travelled, his views of architecture and urban planning were dramatically influenced. As he toured the Mediterranean, he was impressed by the Greek, Roman and Turkish exquisite details and the spatial organisation. Later, visiting Brazil he adopted the curvatures. From North Africa, he acquired knowledge about the Arab architecture. And lastly, in the United States he was impressed by the tall buildings, large street blocks and freeways.

(Steyn, G. (n.d))

He called his designs of modern houses 'Machines of living', they were strikingly original and of cubist minimalism. He was interested in Urban design and planning, as he aimed for better living conditions for the inhabitants of crowded cities.

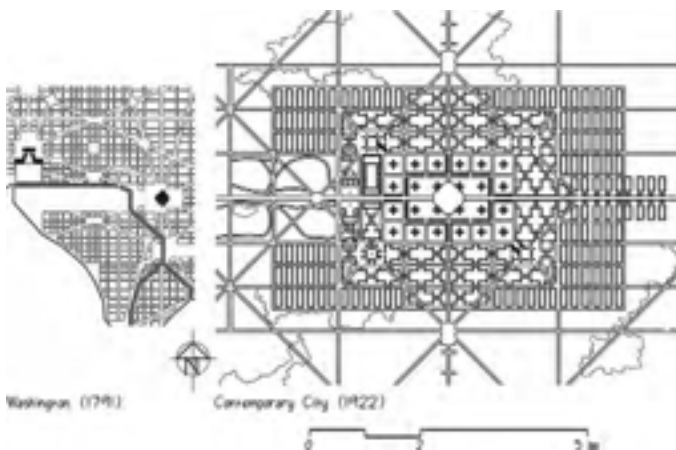
He stressed that “ modern life demands, and is waiting for, a new kind of plan both for houses and for the city”. He incorporated planning principles which he pioneered, most remarkable was ‘the skyscraper in the park’ an idea that is used almost everywhere nowadays, his vision transformed global urban environment.

In 1922, during the modern movement, Le Corbusier presented to the public his plan for “ A Contemporary City of Three Million inhabitants”.

Planning Concept

A symmetrical mono-centric plan with monumental axes cutting through, organised according to a system of land uses. It is an organisation of urban spaces in order to improve the quality of life for the lower classes, it is of a rigid geometrical distribution of uniform buildings with huge open spaces including a system of mass transportation.

The city itself was actually planned for 600,000 people, where two million or more were to be settled in the surrounding garden cities, serviced by a suburban railway network.

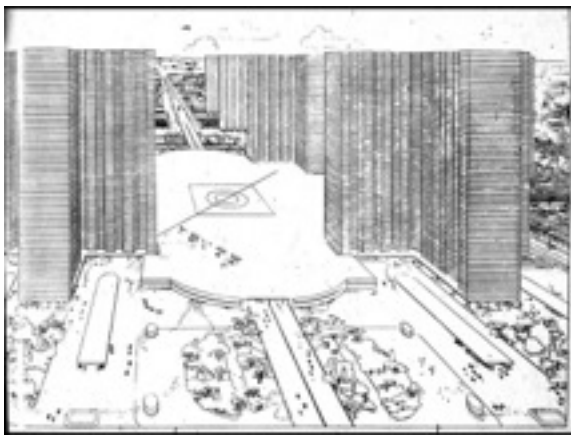


The Image shows the plan of the contemporary city (1)

The Contemporary city was inspired by the zoning of the Baroque town plan of Pierre L’Enfant of Washington in 1791 in which it was inspired in return by the centrality of Versailles in Paris.

The blocks at the perimeter were intended to imitate the great squares of Paris whereas the typical L-shaped apartment units were inspired by the monk's quarters in the monastery. (Steyn, G. (n.d.))

The main concept of the Contemporary city is division, dividing the spaces according to uses and dividing the people, having three main types; the citizen's of the city in which they live and work in the city, the suburban dwellers, those who work in the outer industrial area and live at the peripheral garden cities and the last type are the mixed sort, those who work in the city but live in the surrounding garden cities. Therefore; classification was the keyword that Le Corbusier worked



The Image shows the centre of the contemporary city(2) *The Image shows skyscrapers at the centre (3)*
with, he defined the areas to be used by these three types of inhabitants.

He perceived it as an organ that is compact and centralised yet serves different sectors producing a well organised city. He divided the city to two sectors; an active one and a less active one at the periphery and lying between them a huge space of woods and fields. Also density of population mattered and his approach was to increase number of people in the centre where business affairs were carried and as less distances were to be covered. The business section is in the heart of the city symbolising the centrality of the secular power, comprised of 25 glass cruciform skyscrapers, each with 60 storeys in height (5% of the surface area). The Contemporary city was meant to achieve standardised principles of town planning, as the rigid geometry was a part of the machine aesthetics.(Legates, R., & Frederic, S)



The Image shows an aerial view of the centre of the city and the cruciform skyscrapers. (4)

Also at the base of the skyscrapers, there would be cafes, restaurants, shops, theatres and parking lots. Open spaces were highlighted significantly in the Contemporary city, as Le Corbusier raised the buildings vertically in the centre of the city in order to have more open spaces and fresh air through the city as well as lighting the interior of the buildings with natural light. The next two belts contained residential blocks, stacked up with garden terraces grouped around interior courtyards or arranged in a linear pattern. Therefore; he built the urban dwellings and apartments away from streets with internal courtyard and windows overlooking parks. Beyond the residential blocks, is a vast area of greenery, placing gardens for workers and industrial districts, ports, or even sport complexes. Le Corbusier believed an efficient city site's should be levelled, as it solved traffic issues, and the streets should be spanning high distances and the corridor streets should not be tolerated anymore. The main goal of the project was to facilitate traffic, therefore; fast automobile traffic was completely separated from pedestrians lanes. The highways were elevated, intersecting the city from all sides and connecting the peripheral to the centre of the city while Pedestrian traffic was amid parks and gardens.

Three types of traffic were presented: heavy, light and fast traffic. Le Corbusier solutions were to have the heavy traffic below ground. At the ground level an ordinary network of streets in every direction. And for fast traffic, axes running north and south, east and west that is forming the monumental axes of the city and containing the arterial roads for fast one way traffic. A single two storey railway station should be located at the centre of the city. Garden cities are just beyond the protected zone of woods and fields. The protected zone is reserved for the growth of the city, it is formed by a sequence of small properties representing a numerous return on the capital invested. (Legates, R., & Frederic, S)

The contemporary city was a middle class utopia of social order relying on management & technology that foreshadowed the industrialised cities.

Le Corbusier proposal presented a city solving the urban problems by separation & order.

Proposing a concept for utopian city by Illustrating the principles of the futurist movement of the 1920 at a grand scale, relying on management & technology as well as emphasising the importance of open spaces and parks, focusing on incorporating nature. “Le Corbusier’s impact came not from cities he designed and built himself but from cities that were built by others incorporating the planning principles that he pioneered.” (5)

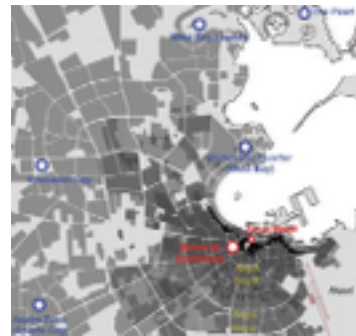
Le Corbusier was criticised by many urban designers and architectural critics, as his proposal of division and classification is very strict and it does not allow for random things and freedom movement that people do. And the fact that there is no integration instead its divided with geometrical base that makes it hard to communicate different sectors together.

Relevance to the City of Doha

As the city of Doha is growing and developing to be more and more looking like the global cities of the world, adopting the principles of global town planning and design. Through the years, the development can be observed from the urban fabric and urban form, going from irregular shaped and closed spaced plans and sites to more standardised urban fabric along with the introduction of automobile, the streets became wider and more emphasised on the urban fabric.



The Image shows the plan of Doha in 1959 (6)



The Image shows the plan of Doha in 2009 (7)

Regarding the urban form, Doha city used to have buildings with few storeys but later adopting the principle of Le Corbusier's by having high raised buildings right in the centre of the city introducing a water front skyline as to be the city's image.



The Image shows the urban form in late 1950s. (8)



The Image shows the urban form in 2010. (9)

Page 6/9

(6): Scharfenort, N. (2013) *In Focus n° 1: Large-Scale Urban Regeneration: A New "Heart" for Doha*. Retrieved from <http://cy.revues.org/2532>

(7): Scharfenort, N. (2013) *In Focus n° 1: Large-Scale Urban Regeneration: A New "Heart" for Doha*. Retrieved from <http://cy.revues.org/2532>

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(9): Florian, W. Salama, A. (2012) URBAN EVOLUTION OF THE CITY OF DOHA. Retrieved from http://jfa.arch.metu.edu.tr/archive/0258-5316/2012/cilt29/sayi_2/35-61.pdf

This development was initiated to create a better environment for the people, and developing the society in a world of fast paced movement. Also for the national vision of Doha city looking specifically at urban development through to 2030 as well as hosting the 2022 Fifa World Cup. Le Corbusier contemporary city, is not applied on the city of Doha as it is a young developing city, but there are principles of the contemporary city which were adopted, as the skyscrapers in the centre of the city acting like a hub for commercial use and business sector, providing with it at the base restaurants, cafes and spaces for the public.

The residential sector is actually all over the city of Doha, apartments, houses and villas can be found in the centre of the city and beyond it. The lack of greenery as Doha is located in the desert at the coast of the persian gulf, therefore; there are no green belts in the city, but the planning authorities are trying to incorporate nature as much as possible by introducing parks and gardens, also minimising the energy by the use of solar panels. Doha is always crowded as the primary element of transportation is a car, since it is a small country there are no metros or trains or even trams but as the population is growing due to the increasing number of immigrants, the planning authorities are planning on having the first metro going from the centre of the city to the north to Al-Shammal and south to Al-Wakra trying to cover the main cities' attractions. Also they are planning on providing water taxis and building new bridges and tunnels underground and elevated above the ground to minimise the traffic and help provide better circulation for everyone. For the centre of the city, bike lanes will be provided and pedestrian lanes will be emphasised by shading devices to encourage people to walk during nice weather. Le Corbusier's Contemporary city is demanding organisation and division of the different sectors, but from my point of view, I think Doha city's planning authorities are trying to mix the different sectors and make a better communication between them.

Conclusion

Le Corbusier admitted that the basic measures of urbanism, are determining the relation between units and network of roads which were all part of the process of fundamental architectural organisation which he had experienced. (Steyn, G. (n.d.))

Even if critics criticised Le Corbusier's Contemporary city, it does not affect the basic principles of town planning he laid out which are nowadays adopted by world's global cities transforming the urban environment. The contemporary city was presented in the 1920s, in which it shows Le Corbusier's futuristic eye and the modern movement he initiated.

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