Capital Planning and State Formation: Examples Outside Europe[1]

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If in European architectural history, the period of the Cold War is considered to have resulted in a heightened perception of incompatibility between the avant-garde and the traditionalist approaches towards architecture and urban planning in the second half of the 20th century, the histories of the colonies of European powers highlight a much greater contrast between 'modern European' and 'traditional indigenous' influences in colonial building projects of the early 20th century. Secondly, early 20th-century colonial capitals – which are representative testimonies of state formation – constitute a temporal and geographic focus within the historiography of architecture and urban planning of the past century that is extremely under-researched. Last but not least, the understanding of European 'modernity' quite often remains abstracted from its colonial context and disregards the contribution of non-Westerners to making such understandings.[2]

In three sections, this paper aims to address these gaps using the example of Imperial New Delhi, the early 20th-century capital of the British Empire in India. The first part provides an overview of the emergence of the modern town planning movement at the turn of the 20th century in the industrialised West, and the enthusiasm that the West shared with colonies when it came to town planning, especially in the British Empire. Focussing on Imperial New Delhi, the following section illustrates the manner in which both 'modern' and 'traditional' elements were integrated in its urban planning and architecture. The complex inter-relationship between these seemingly incompatible elements symbolises the attempt by the British colonial state to reaffirm its power as well as the Indian contribution to the foundation of a 'modern' democratic nation state. By identifying factors behind New Delhi's exclusion from the canons of 'modern' architecture and urban planning despite being a unique early example of its kind, the final part of the paper argues for the necessity of moving beyond the geographic, temporal and aesthetic boundaries of the dominant understanding of 'modern' as established by these canons, and writing "connected histories".[3]

1. Emergence of the Modern Town Planning Movement, and the British Empire

With reference to the European and North American context, the two decades before the First World War were the years when "nearly all the ideas which were to stimulate and inform the practitioners of the new profession of modern town planning in the twentieth century were first articulated".[4] During this period, various urban planning reform movements emerged in the industrialised West as a response to uncontrolled urbanisation and political change. Of these, the City Beautiful Movement and the Garden City Movement were two of the most influential ones.

The former claimed that design of the cities could not be separated from associated social issues and that it should encourage civic engagement and pride. It was furthermore influenced by Beaux-Arts aesthetics. The latter advocated for the development of smaller planned cities that would combine the facilities offered by bigger towns with easy access to nature, like in the countryside. In addition, social welfare of the residents was to be an important planning consideration.

During the same period, another kind and scale of urban development was occurring in parts of the world that had been colonised by European powers. Direct comparisons with the industrialised West are challenging, especially since the aims of town planning in the colonies were quite different from the social aspirations in the West.[5] Nonetheless, the Western centres of imperial power shared their great enthusiasm for town planning with the colonies. Take, for instance, the case of the British Empire where this period coincided with a "vociferous campaign calling for (…) a grand Imperial federation",[6] and the International Town Planning Conference in London in 1910. It was a time when elaborate plans for building new capitals in different parts of the Empire were developed. Ottawa (Canada), Pretoria (South Africa), Canberra (Australia) and New Delhi (India) are representative examples conceived while the modern town planning movement was young and influential.[7]

2. Imperial New Delhi: The 'modern' capital of British India?

Imperial New Delhi was born as a result of the decision to move the capital of British India away from Calcutta, announced in December 1911. The new capital was officially inaugurated in 1931, although parts of the cityscape remained under construction for several years thereafter.[8] India gained independence in 1947, but the former imperial capital remains in use as the seat of administration for the government of the Republic of India to date (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1: (Imperial) New Delhi, aerial view, from west end of central axis towards east end, c. 1949, layout showing influences of 'modern' 20th-century town planning concepts

2.1 Influence of modern town planning concepts

Influences of 20th-century town planning ideas originating in the industrialised West at the turn of the century are evident in the initial discussions concerning the formal elements of the new capital in Delhi, and in the analysis of the city's aesthetic qualities. For instance, as early as 1912, possession of an up-to-date knowledge of town planning and sanitation played a decisive role in the selection of the Delhi Town Planning Committee members.[9] The Committee's final report on the town planning of the new imperial capital and accompanying maps furthermore highlight the British colonial preoccupation with 'modern' town planning concerns of the 20th century, such as water supply and irrigation; sewage system and refuse destruction; railways, roadways and tramways as means of communication; parks and open spaces; arboriculture; as well as development and control.[10]

The aesthetics of the monumental components of the town plan of Imperial New Delhi invokes comparisons with the turn of the century benchmarks established by examples such as the MacMillan Plan for Washington D.C. and Burnham's vision of Chicago (Fig. 2). Moreover, the lush green gardens characterising the low-rise residential area, and green belts in the heart of the city inspire comparisons with garden cities (Fig. 1).[11] Yet, in contrast to social ambitions behind the City Beautiful and Garden City examples in the western world, in Imperial New Delhi 'modern' planning principles were used for strengthening racial and social segregation.[12]

2.2 "Invention of tradition"[13] and appropriation of Indian culture

If modern town planning principles and aesthetics were important in planning the new imperial capital, so was the appropriation of Indian culture. Early 20th-century events such as the Second South African War and Irish Home Rule Movement had shaken Britain's imperial authority at a global level. In India, the Partition of Bengal in 1905 had resulted in a visible growth in political unrest. Britain was fearful of losing the "jewel in her Crown", one of the

largest suppliers of raw materials for her industries and the biggest market for her industrialised goods. This fear was an important reason behind the move away from Calcutta and made the stakes in planning the new imperial capital much higher in comparison to earlier public building projects undertaken in British India. Further alienation of the local Indian population, whose discontent with British rule was becoming increasingly visible, would have been catastrophic for the Empire.[14] Therefore, the "invention of tradition" for the appropriation of Indian history was indispensable in designing the new capital.

This is well illustrated in the choice of the city of Delhi for relocating the British imperial capital, and in the preferred location of the site within the city for constructing the capital. Delhi had been the seat of power of several ancient and medieval empires that had ruled over the Indian subcontinent, and the so far largely unbuilt site selected south of 'Old' Delhi offered the possibility of integrating historic landmarks as anchor points of the otherwise modern town plan (Fig. 3).

2.3 Choice of architectural style: representing 'tradition' and 'progress'

The importance of representing both 'tradition' and 'progress' in the design of the new imperial capital in Delhi is furthermore exemplified by the choice of the architectural style. To begin with, there were mixed opinions regarding the style to be employed. These ranged from favouring a purely Western or a purely 'oriental' style of architecture, to advocating a 'Western style with oriental motifs'. Although the latter was finally selected, the 'oriental' style – consisting of Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic features – was used primarily for its aesthetic qualities and symbolic associations and, in some instances, for reasons of climate control (Fig. 4). In contrast, it was the dominant presence of the Western style in New Delhi's architecture that was meant to cast in stone the grand imperial vision of a 'modern' India under British rule.[15] In considering itself the legitimate successor of the legacy of the Greek and Roman Empires, the British Empire justified its perceived necessity to retain its imperial presence in India by arguing for the continuing need of its 'civilising mission' in the subcontinent.[16] The selected neo-classical revival style was thus meant to be a symbol of 'progress' for British colonial India in the 20th century, using a time-tested ancient Western architectural tradition (Fig. 5).

2.4 Foundations of a 'modern' democratic nation state: the Indian contribution

And yet, Imperial New Delhi symbolises more than just the British attempt at strengthening the colonial state in the face of growing political resistance to imperial authority

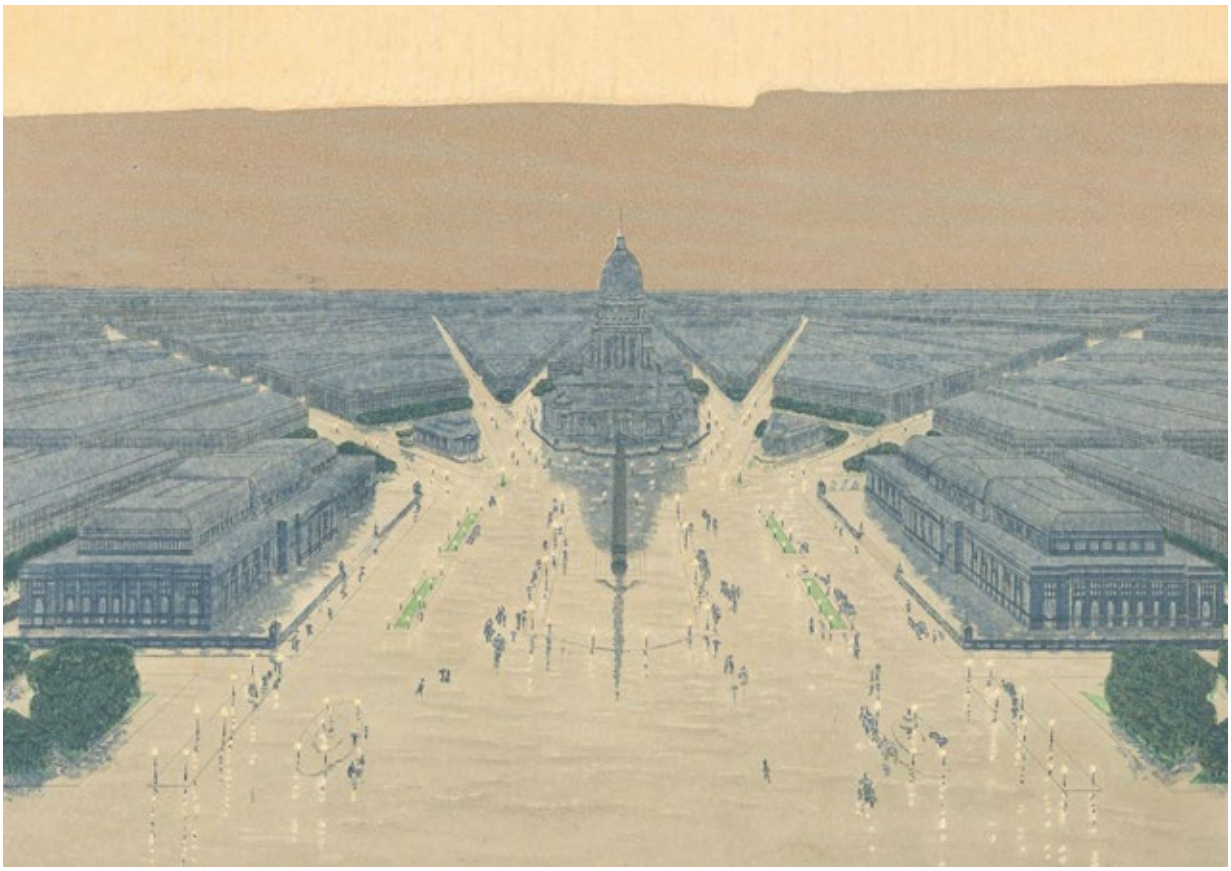

Fig. 2: Chicago, view looking west, proposed civic centre plaza and surrounding buildings, 1909 Plan of Chicago or "Burnham's Plan", painted Jules Guerin, for the Commercial Club

Fig. 3: (Imperial) New Delhi, layout plan, c. 1934, highlighting association with surrounding ancient and medieval historic monuments

and showcasing the achievements of the Empire's 'civilising mission'. The town plan of the imperial capital also embodies the spirit of the Indian contribution towards the foundation of a 'modern' democratic nation state, illustrated – for instance – by the introduction of the Council House building after the First World War.

According to the initial plans for the new capital, the Council Chamber in the Viceroy's House was to be the place for the government to make important decisions. However, increasing demands of a strengthening national movement for higher Indian representation in the government and a significant Indian contribution to the British

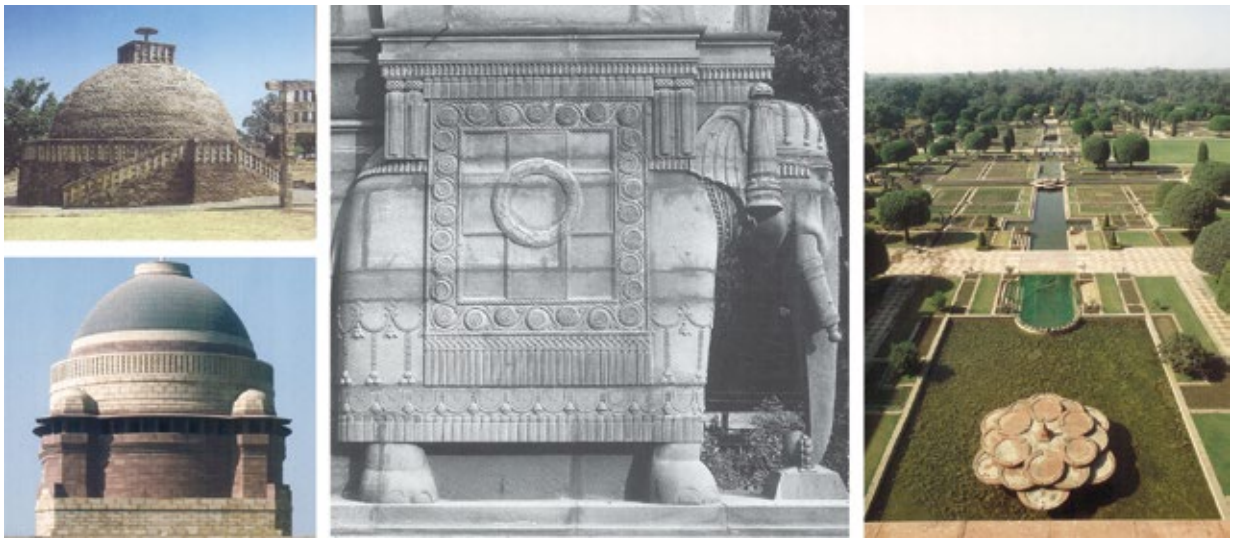

Fig. 4: (Top left): Buddhist stupa, Sanchi, India; (bottom left): (Imperial) New Delhi, former Viceroy's House, view of east front of main dome; (centre): (Imperial) New Delhi, entrance to former Viceroy's Court, decorative elephant sculpture; (right): (Imperial) New Delhi, former Viceroy's House, view of the Mughal Garden from east to west

effort in the First World War intervened.[17] By 1919, it had become necessary to allocate the decision-making function to a new building specially designed for the purpose – i.e. the Council House. The legislative building thus embodies the gradual shift of power away from an autocratic rule to semi-representative parliamentary institutions and continues to be used by the Indian Parliament more than seventy years after the country's independence (Fig. 6).

3. Rethinking Modernity

Utilising numerous formal elements associated with the modern town planning movement at the turn of the century and embodying the progressive spirit of a nascent democracy, Imperial New Delhi is a unique 'modern' example of an early 20th-century colonial capital city. It furthermore illustrates the existence of and the inseparable connection between Western and non-Western concepts of 'tradition' and 'progress' in colonial architecture and urban planning

Fig. 5: New Delhi, aerial view towards west end of central axis, former Viceroy's House atop Raisina Hill flanked by South (left) and North (right) Secretariat blocks, showing dominant use of neo-classical revival style

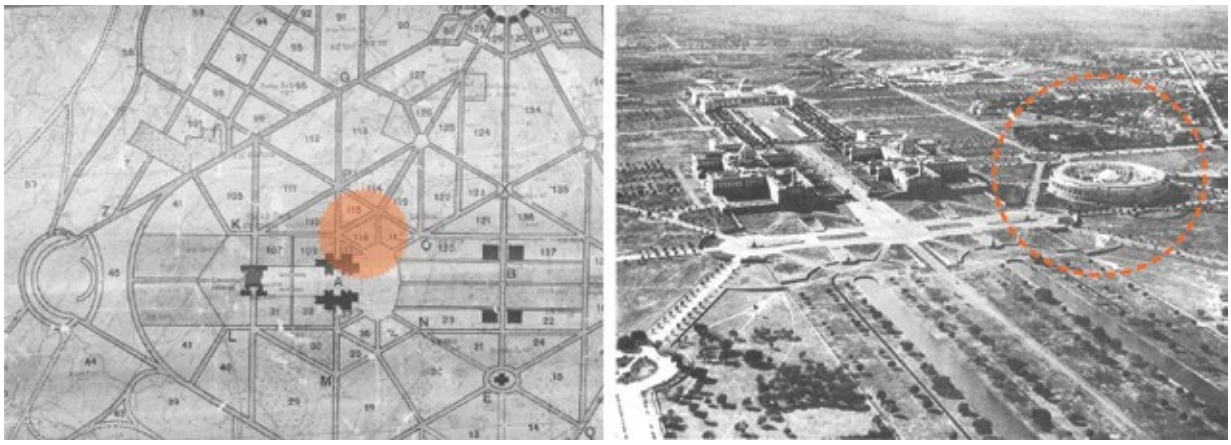

Fig. 6: (Left): Imperial New Delhi, tentative distribution of plots for new capital, c. 1912, highlighting Plot 116, originally allocated for construction of officers' quarters; (right): New Delhi, aerial view, c. 1933, highlighting Council House building constructed on Plot 116 as a result of the First World War

of the time. However, outrageously, today the city is hardly ever perceived or referred to as 'modern'. This amnesia concerning the rightful place of Imperial New Delhi in the history of 20th-century architecture and, especially, urban planning can be attributed largely to the manner in which the historiography of 20th-century architecture and urban planning, and that of Imperial New Delhi have evolved.

The bent of the former towards the International Modern Movement, as it emerged in the Western world, and its regional variations has resulted in a prejudiced perception as to what falls under the category of 'modern' architecture and urban planning – especially with reference to the time frame and aesthetics. This has resulted in the exclusion of significant examples of modernity, especially in geographic regions that were still colonised by European powers in the early 20th century. And when it comes to the historiography of Imperial New Delhi, it is Edwin Lutyens and his contributions – particularly to the architecture of the city – that overshadow most other aspects of the architectural and planning history of the imperial capital in Delhi. Therefore, just as Lutyens, who is considered to be the greatest British architect after Christopher Wren, has come to be inseparably linked with the revival of the neo-classical style in early 20th-century Britain,[18] the predominant perception of Imperial New Delhi has been restricted to its image as being Lutyens's grandest neo-classical creation.[19] These factors have left little scope for alternative narratives on the 'modernity' of Imperial New Delhi – as identified above – to be acknowledged and accepted.

The case of Imperial New Delhi thus clearly highlights the imminent need to rethink and redefine the meaning of 'modern' – in geographic, temporal and aesthetic terms – when it comes to the architecture and urban planning of the 20th century. In addition, it underlines the case for writing a connected history of modern architecture and urban planning in the 20th century, which takes into consideration developments in the Western and non-Western part of the world in the first and second half of the past century alike.

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2 BHAMBRA, Rethinking Modernity, 2009, pp. 15–33.

3 Ibid., p. 15, referring to an idea by Sanjay Subhramanyam in an article published in Modern Asian Studies, July 1997, vol. 31, no. 3.

4 MELLER, Philanthropy Public Enterprise, 1995, p. 295.

5 See KING, Colonial Urban Development, 1976; WRIGHT, Politics of Design, 1991; and ALSAYYAD, Forms of Dominance, 1999.

6 DARWIN, Third Empire, 2001, p. 66.

7 As stated in the editorial of The Town Planning Review in October 1913: "Within twelve months plans of two capital cities have come under our notice for review: Canberra and Delhi – what better reply to those who hold that there is no use for Town Planning, all our cities being built". Anonymous, Editorials, 1913, p. 185.

8 PATEL, From Ghalib's Delhi, 2014, pp. xix–xliii.

9 The Committee members included Captain George Swinton – Chairman of the London County Council, John A. Brodie – a Liverpool Borough Engineer, and Edwin Landseer Lutyens – a famed English country house architect with town planning experience. See also IRVING, Indian Summer, 1981, pp. 39-42.

10 SWINTON / BRODIE / LUTYENS, Final Report, 1913, pp. 1-9.

11 Edwin Lutyens had previously been associated with Thomas Adams in the design of Knebworth Garden Suburb and worked on the Hampstead Garden Suburb with Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, who in turn were responsible for the design of Letchworth Garden City – the world's first garden city. See SIMPSON, Thomas Adam, 1985, pp. 48–51, and IRVING, Indian Summer,

1981, pp. 84f.

[12] KING, Colonial Urban Development, 1976, p. 246f.

[13] HOBSBAWM / RANGER (eds.), Invention of Tradition, 2000, pp. 1–14.

[14] Cf. DARWIN, Third Empire, 2001, p. 65f.; CHAKRAVARTY, Architecture Politics, 1997, pp. 61–88, and FIELDHOUSE, Metropolitan Economics, 2001, pp. 98–100 and HAVELL, Ancient Medieval Architecture India, 1915, p. vii.

[15] Cf. VOLWAHSEN, Imperial Delhi, 2002, pp. 18f.

[16] Cf. IRVING 1981.

[17] BROWN, India, 2001, pp. 429f.

[18] Cf. STAMP, Rise Fall Rise, 1981; HUSSEY, Life Lutyens, 1984; and AMERY / RICHARDSON (eds.), Lutyens Work, 1988.

[19] Cf. BYRON, New Delhi, 1931.

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Hauptstadtplanung und Staatsbildung: Beispiele außerhalb Europas

Abstract*

Die Kolonien boten den europäischen Mächten ein Experimentierfeld im Bereich der Architektur und insbesondere im Städtebau. Dieser Aufsatz analysiert beispielhaft die Stadtplanung Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts für Delhi, Hauptstadt von Britisch-Indien und zeigt, wie Tradition und Fortschritt in Architektur und Stadtplanung auch im kolonialen Kontext „untrennbar miteinander verbunden“ waren. Zugleich wird damit das geografische, zeitliche und stilistische Verständnis der Moderne des vergangenen Jahrhunderts aus postkolonialer Sicht kritisch hinterfragt und erweitert.

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