Historical and conceptual perspectives on urban regeneration: a prolog to a special issue

Historical and Conceptual Perspectives on Urban Regeneration: A Prologue to a Special Issue

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- **Purpose:** This paper reviews multiple historical perspectives on urban regeneration interventions while also serving as a prologue to the rationale for a special issue of the *Journal of Place Management and Development (JPMD)* on Placemaking and Sustainable Urban Regeneration in Japan.

- **Design/methodology/approach:** The paper reviews literature on city center regeneration, with particular attention to the US and the UK contexts. The emphasis is on comparing and contrasting what have become known as the North American and the European regeneration models. This background is helpful to place the Special Issue in a broad international context.

- **Findings:** The key finding is that the history of planning city centers appears to be largely a response to urbanization and the problems it has brought forward. The papers in this JPMD’s special issue exemplify this finding with cases from Toyama, Kanazawa, and Tokyo.

- **Originality:** Cities are transformed as their centers grow and develop. City centers represent important anchor points in every community. However, evolving functional decentralization has occurred mostly due to changes in flows of capital, people, materials, and other socio-economic transformations. The review shows how urban regeneration programs tend to be implemented to correct and/or improve physical, socio-economic and environmental problems associated with functional and programmatic decentralizations.

Urban regeneration; city beautiful; urban renewal; city enterprise; sustainable and creative city; special issue; Japan.

**Introduction**

Cities tend to grow in three directions: Inward, by crowding; upward, with multi-storied buildings; or outward toward the periphery (Nivola, 2000, p.26). No matter how cities grow, they all have or had in the not distant past a center. Usually, city centers are the focus of every community; they are places full of life and rich in architecture. However, as cities grow and develop, functional decentralization occurs due to changes in flows of capital, people, materials, and other socio-economic transformations. Cities can even lose most urban functions, become derelict places and experience physical obsolescence, which is known to cause severe social and economic problems. Urban regeneration programs are implemented
in order to correct some or most of these problems. Often these actions are requested by local stakeholders and delivered by public authorities. In other cases, they are imposed on local residents by public authorities in name of progress or the public interest.

Lately, the literature on city center transformations has been growing. North American urban interventions during the second half of the XXth century have been analyzed by Faulk (2006) and Grodach and Ehrenfeucht (2015). However, there is still a lacuna in how cities on either side of the Atlantic Ocean have been transformed as a result of globalization and urbanization tendencies. This paper reviews multiple historical perspectives on urban regeneration interventions while also serving as a prologue to and the rationale for a JPMD’s Special Issue on Placemaking and Sustainable Urban Regeneration in Japan.

Even though this review departs from Berube and Katz’s (2006) comparative study of American and British cities, the emphasis is on comparing and contrasting what have become known as the North American and the European regeneration models (European Commission, 2016). While these two models are mostly theoretical abstractions, here they are analyzed in order to identify basic differences, and, above all, similarities in the way governments have intervened in urban centers (Summers et al., 1999).

One would perhaps not think that an island state such as Japan could have possessed the second largest economy in the world. However, Japan held such rank until 2011. The Japanese urbanistic culture and tradition has been commensurate with its efficient use of the territory’s resources as well as with the connections the country has been able to establish overseas. The Meiji Restoration and the opening up of Japan in 1868 resulted partly from borrowing modernizing foreign ideas and attitudes. Although the country changed in part due to the importation of multiple technologies absorbed from the western world and implemented with unique Japanese authenticity, planners of all stripes have since been interested in learning from the Japanese city and society (Shelton, 2012).

Major single-author tomes by non-Japanese scholars who have studied modern Japanese development and urban planning in detail are Sorensen (2002) and Edgington (2011). While some of the most recent edited collections on a myriad of topics ranging from decentralization, cities, local environments, urban planning, public spaces, culture, society, and rural development include Hein and Pelletier (2006), Brumann and Schulz (2011), and Manzenreiter et al. (2020). These books in English by two Japanese scholars, Hidenobu (1995) and Usui (2014), deserve to be highlighted as well.

When it comes to scholarly articles in academic journals, one finds a rich variety of scattered articles published in contemporary town planning, urbanism, urban studies, and
regional development topics. However, special issues of journals have been quite limited with for instance a special issue of the *Journal of Urban History* in 2016. This issue of the *Journal of Place Management and Development* is dedicated to sustainable urban regeneration at various scales in Japan. It intends to fill a missing gap in recent scholarship on how Japan has been dealing with its most recent neighborhood, city-region, metropolitan and national development phenomena.

This review article is in two parts. Part I utilizes three of the ten periods identified by Hall (1989) and the three generations of neighborhood regeneration programs identified by Carmon (1997, 1999) to help structure an international evolutionary perspective. These temporal and thematic categorizations are complemented with a range of other systematizations in order to derive these four main city center intervention phases: (i) the city beautiful, (ii) the city renewable, (iii) the city enterprise, and (iv) the sustainable and creative city (Hall, 2000; Landry, 2000; Waits, 2001). Part II is the prologue to and the rationale for this JPMD’s Special Issue on Placemaking and Sustainable Urban Regeneration in Japan. The literature review addresses urban revitalization efforts mostly up to the early 2000s. However, an attempt was made to show how planning scholarship and practices were perceived by symposia participants as technical innovations across world regions, especially the US and Japan, mainly due to academic exchanges and reciprocal *in loco* study visits to major urban revitalization operations in both Tokyo and Phoenix, Arizona, starting in the mid-2000s.

**PART I – History and Concepts**

**City Beautiful**

In order to understand the city beautiful movement at the end of the nineteenth century it is crucial to remember that early city planning in the United States emerged from the landscape architecture and the *beaux-arts* traditions in urban design. As a result of the industrial revolution, cities were considered ugly, unhealthy, overcrowded and congested. Modern city planning was promoted as a means to mitigate these aesthetic and functional conditions. The city beautiful movement in North America was based on traditional European urbanism. Stelter (2000, p.99) has claimed that the city beautiful movement embodied three very positive planning ideas: (i) the city as a work of art, (ii) the broadening of the leadership involved in the planning process, and (iii) a theory of the city as an organism that required holistic and comprehensive rather than piecemeal planning. The city beautiful movement is
known to have brought together the ideas of municipal art and civic improvements (Figure 1). Plans tended to focus on those elements over which municipal governments had clear control (e.g., streets, municipal art, public buildings, and public spaces). Quite often, this movement sought to create or remake a part of the city such as a civic center, a boulevard or a parkway (Levy, 1994).

Frederick Law Olmsted saw planning achievements in the capacity to reduce disease and provide sunlight, good air circulation, open space and parks. But the city beautiful movement was best symbolized by the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition of Chicago (Wilson, 1989). This exposition played an important role in demonstrating the possibilities of re-planning city centers on a grand scale. Daniel Burnham was the leading proponent of the city beautiful approach. Two major assumptions of this movement were that the solutions to the urban crisis were to be focused on the reform of the city itself, rather than to withdraw to new towns in the countryside and abandon the city, and that the central city should have precedence over the peripheric suburbs.

**Figure 1 San Francisco’s Civic Center (California)**
Author’s archive (2016)

Based on this philosophic rationality, a group of rich merchants asked Daniel Burnham to develop a plan to boost business activity in Chicago. This request resulted in the 1909 Plan of Chicago and the Wacker’s Manual of the Plan of Chicago. These two documents assumed the proportions of a real reform movement, where the predominant idea
was that structured, orderly public buildings, circulatory systems and civic landscapes would result in an enlightened citizenry. Burnham’s “make no little plans!” statement is probably best exemplified by the Mall in Washington, D.C., with its vistas, symmetric developments and axial layouts. But this movement was also successful with smaller and less grandiose beautification goals as well; examples included putting utility wires underground, improving street furniture, restricting signage, and expanding urban parks (Gerckens, 1988; Wilson, 1989). Quite revolutionary for that era, Szczygiel has (2003) called attention to the important role of women in the formulation of city beautiful plans.

In spite of these praises, other authors claimed that the city beautiful movement also entailed various shortcomings. For instance, Stelter (2000, p.98) wrote that in the US “many plans were hastily drawn up with little chance for success, some were ruinously expensive, some put forward by outside consultants ignored local traditions and even geography, most did not appear to address larger social issues such as poverty and the lack of housing.” Other critics argued that the beautification improvements were no more than “municipal cosmetic,” they neglected housing, schools and sanitation. Some grand plans remained unrealized, due to enormous costs and lack of political will. Hall (1988, p.202) characterized the movement as “planning for display, architecture as theater and design intended to impress” (emphasis added).

Regarding public participation, Stelter (2000, p.115) has argued that the city beautiful movement broadened the base of decision-making in America, “where it was associated with urban political reform and civic activism (…) the experts, often architects, shared the stage with commercial-civic elites.” And this was seen in the efforts to promote plans. For instance, the Wacker’s Manual of the Plan of Chicago was distributed through the city’s schools, churches and other civic institutions. However, the major problem with this approach was that many of those visions lacked public input during the plan-making phase because political power was exercised mainly in a top-down fashion. But as Levy (1994, p.39) also recognized, “judging the plan by the standards of a later day is not entirely fair.”

Nevertheless, this movement provided one of the first windows in history to analyze and understand subsequent urban revitalization interventions (Grodach and Ehrenfeucht, 2015). In synthesis, the city beautiful movement’s main characteristics were the need for city boosterism, the focus on central areas and on public space improvements, and the emphasis on top-down perspectives with limited participation during the plan making phase.
City Renewable

The urban renewal movement can be divided into two distinct phases. The first phase corresponds to a period marked by physical determinism – a belief in urban design and rationality as capable to provide adequate solutions to urban problems. The second phase corresponds to a period marked by social concerns. Both phases appeared as a counter-movement to the suburbanization trend towards dispersal. Even though the scale of urban renewal in the US was different from the urban renewal experienced in Europe, it is possible to identify a similar trend toward massive redevelopment of urban neighborhoods. In Europe there was a need to rebuild the cities bombed during the war. In the US there was the need to redevelop apparently run-down and dilapidated areas. Table 1 shows three generations of neighborhood remedies utilized mostly in the US and the UK.

According to Levy (1994, p.56) “the postwar period saw a large expansion of planning activity at the city, town, and county level. (...) Postwar suburbanization stimulated planning activity in thousands of suburban cities and towns by thrusting on them the problems of urban growth.” The major problem faced by cities in the post-war period was the competition for investment by suburban areas. “Initially suburbanization was largely limited to residential, industrial and related functions, but from the 1950s and 1960s onwards there was increasing decentralization of other functions, especially retail and later office functions” (Oc and Tiesdell, 1997, p.10).

The traditional city development was seen as obsolete, an impediment to building in a rational and functional way, and to exploiting the opportunities and ease the problems of the modern city. The earlier solutions seemed to be making downtown appear more like the suburbs, less dense and more automobile oriented. This augmented the need to re-build and renew the existing urban fabric. At that time, the modernism movement supported by the ideas of the Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) was starting to influence planning and architecture practices. And as Paumier (1988, p.15) noted, “Le Corbusier’s vision of the high-rise building, located in the splendid isolation of a park or plaza, became the favored approach to urban development, whether low-income housing or corporate headquarters.”

The second phase of the urban renewal movement appeared as a reaction to the Modernism movement and was more sensitive to social issues.

Physical Determinism

Physical determinism is the assumption that by acting rationally and physically on problems, planners would be able to solve them. In the US, early urban renewal thinking was
a way to deal with the difficulties that downtowns faced when competing with the suburbs. Urban renewal started as slum clearance and a housing program. Title 1 (Slum Clearance and Urban Development) of the Housing Act of 1949 launched a series of measures aimed at redeveloping downtown areas. This was the legislative mandate for the federal urban renewal program which lasted until 1974. This legislation allowed federal money to be applied by local authorities to acquire privately held “blighted” land, predominantly residential in character, and to sell it for redevelopment, yet adequate housing tools were not provided (Hall, 1988).

Table 1 Three generations of neighborhood remedies
Adapted from Carmon (1997, p.138).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Generation (1950s and 60s)</th>
<th>Second Generation (1960s and 70s)</th>
<th>Third Generation (1970s, 80s and 90s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demolition</td>
<td>US: war on poverty, model cities; UK: GIA, HAA</td>
<td>Centrification, incumbent upgrading, upgrading by immigrants, urban flagship projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Historical and Ideological background</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic prosperity, physical determinism</td>
<td>Economic growth, believe in caring for the public interest and in long-range, comprehensive and rational planning</td>
<td>Economic stagnation; business like approaches: competitiveness, efficiency, exploiting immediate opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main players</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central government, private developers, local authorities</td>
<td>Central government, planners, local residents</td>
<td>Private investors (large and small), local authorities, nonprofit organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of planners</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architects take a leading role, planners act as critics</td>
<td>Planners, mainly from academia, lead</td>
<td>Promoters of economic development; negotiators and deal makers, mediators between authorities and investors and seldom between residents and other players</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal lessons</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘No’ to massive demolition and displacement, ‘No’ to mega structures for poor pollution</td>
<td>Working only with neighborhoods and only with existing populations is beneficial to the residents but does not change neighborhood and status</td>
<td>Regeneration is possible, but piecemeal efforts create islands of revitalization within seas of decline and lead to increasing disparity between populations</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Business leaders and corporate elites frequently took the initiative in planning urban renewal programs. Fainstein (1998, p.615) posited that “because city governments were seeking to attract and retain middle-class residents, they encouraged the redevelopment of
upper-income housing on centrally located properties.” The same author gave the example of the Boston Renewal Authority, which “razed apartment buildings housing multi-ethnic working-class community located on a large tract adjacent to downtown and affording excellent views of the Charles River and replaced them with a luxury high-rise project.”

Famous epithets from this period were that “what looks like a slum is a slum,” and “urban renewal equals Negro removal” (Balsas, in-press). The slum areas were frequently replaced by shopping centers, office towers, and cultural and civic centers. This phase of planning history in the US is known as the federal bulldozer due to the great support from the federal government in clearing up entire neighborhoods. In fact, Hall (1988, p.232) mentioned that “to March 1961 the program had destroyed four times as many units as had been built, typically, land was left vacant, since the average scheme took twelve years to complete. Nearly 40 percent of the new construction was not for housing, and of the replacement housing units, most were privately built high-rise apartments commanding high-rents.”

But this massive clearance was not endogenous to the US planning philosophy. Massive slum clearance started in Britain with the 1930 Greenwood Act of the Labor party. Later, Hall (2000, p.26) posited that “in Europe there was also a burst of planning activity immediately around World War II (…). This activity was overwhelmingly driven by the strong motivation to begin comprehensive postwar reconstruction of bomb damage and (in a few cases exclusively) of outworn slum housing.” The ensuing decline in urban vitality also resulted from a rigid functional zoning of cities and urban areas in British and many European cities (Oc and Tiesdell, 1997). In brief, in Europe slum clearance was a central feature of urban “improvements,” which was reinforced by the modernism tradition, by WWII, and by the assumption that historic districts could be opened up to unlimited automobile traffic.

The British and American policies and programs of this period had one main difference: “In Britain, urban renewal activities were controlled by public authorities, [while], many urban renewal programs in the US were governed by private developers” (Carmon, 1997, p.132). However, administrations in both countries were criticized for “ignoring the heavy psychological cost of enforced relocation and the social cost of the destruction of healthy communities” (Carmon, 1999, p.146). There are little doubts that the urban renewal period was a time of intense redevelopment. But this period was also a time of social convulsion and criticism that resulted in more social equity and environmental planning requirements during the 1970s. Jane Jacobs (1961) and Herbert Gans (1962) were two of the
most laudable critics of the negative effects of the urban renewal movement in the US. These criticisms also coincided with the growth of the urban conservation movement and the first signs of resentment against modernistic ideas.

**Social and Rehabilitation Emphasis**

The second phase of the urban renewal movement during the 1960s and 1970s was marked by social problems and very influenced by severe criticisms to the bulldozer approach of the first phase. In fact, criticisms to the federal urban renewal program for destroying usable buildings, reducing the stock of affordable housing, and creating cleared out districts in cities led to changes in the 1949 legislation. In 1954 incentives for rehabilitation rather than wholesale clearance were added, and the requirement of a “workable program” and redevelopment plan was imposed (Gerckens, 1988). This program included neighborhood analyses, housing for displaced persons, and citizen participation in the redevelopment process.

Hall (1989, p.280) claimed that “the civil rights movement had been followed by the free speech movement; the riots had torn through the newly renewed cities, revealing just how little the process had done for the underclass.” As a response to these complaints, the federal government passed the Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act in 1966, which was aimed at community preservation, coordination of physical and social planning and rehabilitation rather than demolition (Fainstein, 1998).

In the US, the turning point is usually equated with the opposition to urban highways in Boston, New York, and San Francisco. Hall (1989, p.280) recognized that this happened not only in the US but also in Europe; “the same revolution stopped freeways in London, Covent Garden redevelopment, and renewal in Central Stockholm as well as in Paris.” The idea that planning was done by “benign value-free experts” gave place to sentiments of distrust in planning expertise and demands for advocacy planning (Hall, 1989). So, beginning in the 1970s the role of the federal government in urban redevelopment was greatly reduced, and local governments increasingly relied on public-private partnerships to foster redevelopment activities. In addition to this decrease in federal funding, the out-migration of affluent residents to the suburbs contributed to what became known as the “central city shrinkage” and its urban fiscal problems.

In the UK, Carmon (1999, p.147) argued that “similar socio-economic forces were active during the 1960s and 1970s, creating similar although not identical responses in the area of urban regeneration.” The improvement of older homes and their environment became
the dominant component of public policies, while historic preservation moved from its traditional concern with individual structures to an emphasis on the urban and social contexts of those structures.

**City Enterprise**

The third urban movement in this review became known as the 1980s’ “City Enterprise,” mainly because free market enterprise partly substituted public initiative (Carmon, 1997). During the 1980s, there was a need to regenerate decaying urban economies by adding new activities into them. Advanced economies were increasingly shifting towards knowledge-based industries, including both high-technology manufacturing and advanced services. And planners found themselves increasingly promoting economic development initiatives.

In the US, the Reagan administration proposed to shrink the total role of government in the US economy. Municipal and state governments were increasingly forced to rely on their own sources of revenue to promote redevelopment. Local authorities started to employ property and sales tax exemptions and abatements for a period of years after new construction, and tax district programs to entice private developers to invest in downtown areas. Tax district programs, of which business improvement districts (BIDs) are an example (Mitchell, 2001), were created to return portions of the property tax or special assessments to the area that generates the funds rather than to the municipality’s general fund.

Carmon (1999) divided the various strategies of these business-inspired planning approaches to central city revitalization in two main groups: Public-individual partnerships and public-private partnerships. The former included cases in which investments by individual households and small businesses were supplemented directly (subsidized loans) or indirectly (special regulations, investments in public ground) by public involvement. This resulted in three main types of effects: (i) gentrification, (ii) upgrading by residents, and (iii) upgrading by immigrants. Stoecker (1997) and Fainstein (1998) mention the role of community development corporations (CDC) in revitalizing housing and commercial neighborhoods. These CDCs raised funds from a variety of public and private sources, including churches, foundations, governments, banks, and financial intermediaries. While these corporations might be undercapitalized and in need of restructuring, their philosophy belonged to the public-private approach and remained as an alternative to empowering neighborhood communities.
The latter group referred to cooperation between large private investors and public authorities. Hall (1989) posited that this cooperation was the most distinctive feature of the 1980s, and the same author also called it “planning-as-project” or “planning-as-real-estate-development.” In the US, this magic formula became known as “Rousification” accruing its name to the private developer James Rouse, who incorporated a new combination of recreation, culture, shopping, and mixed-income housing under the concept of adaptive re-use (Figure 2), meaning “the rehabilitation and recycling of old physical structures to new uses” (Hall, 1988, p.350). The Baltimore experience has been described by Levine (1987, p.103) as having created two cities:

“a city of developers, suburban professionals, and back-to-the-city gentry who have ridden the downtown revival to handsome profits, good jobs, and conspicuous consumption; and a city of impoverished blacks and displaced manufacturing workers, who continue to suffer from shrinking economic opportunities, declining public services, and neighborhood distress.”

**Figure 2 Festival Mall Quincy Market in downtown Boston, Massachusetts**

Author’s archive (2017)
Hall (1989, p.281) described this process as “public planning and public money being harnessed to the pursuit of private profit.” In addition, enterprise and empowerment zones were created to promote redevelopment in the US. Originally proposed but not adopted, as federal legislation, a majority of states enacted enterprise zone statutes during the 1980s. State enterprise zones provided exemptions from state and local taxes and regulations. In 1993 a modified enterprise zone bill was adopted providing for the establishment of nine empowerment zones and 50 enterprise communities. This federal legislation was aimed at stimulating redevelopment in poor neighborhoods – often downtowns – and providing businesses in these districts with federal tax and regulatory relief and additional grants (Fainstein, 1998).

Although, the experience with these empowerment zones and community capacity building proposals has not been totally accessed, central cities in the United States experienced uneven development, with greater attention paid to their downtowns and allocation of resources made accordingly in attempts to revitalize central business districts (Keating and Krumholz, 1991). On the one hand, Frieden and Sagalyn (1989) provide a story of how shopping malls were built in downtown areas, and in the authors’ view, dramatically improved urban life, by creating well-paying and decent jobs for minorities.

On the other, Krumholz (1999) defended that these jobs consisted of mostly part-time opportunities, offered few benefits and seldom provided viable paths for career advancement and promotion. This reinforced what Keating and Krumholz (1991) had concluded before after reviewing several downtown plans of that era. They not only disregarded equity issues but also increased disparities between the upper and lower classes. So, as Carmon (1997, p.137) also concluded, “the trickle-down theory, according to which the benefits of rapid economic development are expected to filter down and reach all strata in society, has not been found to work.”

The Sustainable and Creative City

This discomfort with the trickle-down theory, on the one hand may have led Hall (2000, p.33) to equate planning in the following terms, “planning was widely perceived as a routine, unimaginative, bureaucratic regulatory activity, generally disliked but regarded as a necessary evil.” And on the other, Roberts (2000, p.16) reminded us that “there was a high degree of coincidence between the history of the content, structure and operation of urban
policy, and the general evolution of political attitudes, social values and economic power.” So, in the 1990s full circle was reached and North American society started to experience a tendency for re-urbanization, which has been explained by Oc and Tiesdell (1997, p.16) in the following terms,

“city center decline is exacerbated by a time lag (…) once property owners have adjusted to new market conditions by lowering their rents, the decline of city centers as the prime location presents an opportunity (…) for new developments and functions within the city center (…) the challenge is to find a new economic role or niche for the city center.”

During the last decade sustainable development and creativity increasingly seemed to be the answer. Environmental concerns, fueled by the sustainable development ideals, moved center stage and influenced the way urban development and regeneration occurred. The notion of sustainable development was originally developed within the environmental sphere and legitimized by the Brundtland Report in 1987, and further through the Rio Summit in 1992 as being “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” But sustainability soon became interpreted in its multiple economic, social and cultural dimensions (Newman and Kenworthy, 1999).

Sustainability has been endorsed through the legislation and directives of the European Union as a primary Europe-wide objective. The European Sustainable Cities action framework advanced four principles of urban sustainability in urban management, policy integration, ecosystems thinking and cooperation and partnership. Most European nations prepared national sustainability strategies, as well as a variety of other national-level action plans and standards. Hall and Landry (1997) conducted research on more than 500 urban innovation practices for the European Foundation. Mega (2000) presented many examples of cities throughout Europe that successfully implemented sustainable development in a variety of areas (Figure 3).

Perhaps the boldest undertaking to incorporate the principles of sustainable development were those identified in the Urban Task Force’s (1999) report “Towards an Urban Renaissance.” This study offered a vision for improving the living conditions of British cities, developed a framework for the future of urban areas and proposed new measures to achieve quality urban (re)development. This phase constituted one of the most recent stages in the British urban regeneration policy, which has evolved through the
following consecutive phases: Reconstruction, revitalization, renewal, redevelopment and regeneration (Table 2).

Roberts (2000, p.17) proposed a definition of urban regeneration as being “the comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a last improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change.” The same author also argued that there was little doubt that sustainable development was likely to dominate the theory and practice of urban regeneration and of urban management in the future (Robert, 2000).

**Figure 3 World’s Fair Expo’98 precinct in Lisbon, Portugal**
Author’s archive (2010)

In the United States, sustainability has been widely interpreted to mean urban consolidation and compaction and it appears related to more traditional forms of urbanism (e.g., New Urbanism), and to attempts to control growth at the regional level (e.g., Smart Growth). In the US, Waits (2001, p.4) have advocated that “[r]evitalized downtowns may be the biggest surprise of the past decade. Downtown Austin, Portland, Boston, and Dayton, for example and South of Market Street in San Francisco have become new places to nurture and grow start-ups in the software, creative services, and multimedia sectors.”

A second tendency in the 1990s was the goal to promote creative cities and to take advantage of how cultural evolution shaped urban development and the intrinsic link between creativity and the development of culture (Landry, 2000). Collaborative Economics (2001,
p.4) advanced a definition of creativity as “the process by which ideas are generated, connected, and transformed into things that are valued.” Technological and business innovation, artistic and cultural innovation and civic innovation comprised important issues capable of affecting the paths of whole communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>1950s Policy Type</th>
<th>1960s Revitalization</th>
<th>1970s Renewal</th>
<th>1980s Redevelopment</th>
<th>1990s Regeneration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major strategic orientation</strong></td>
<td>Reconstruction and extension of older areas often based on a ‘masterplan’; suburban growth</td>
<td>Continuation of the 1950s theme; suburban and peripheral growth; some early attempts at rehabilitation</td>
<td>Focus on in-situ renewal and neighborhood schemes; still development at periphery</td>
<td>Many major schemes of development and redevelopment; flagship and out of town projects</td>
<td>Move towards a more comprehensive form of policy and practice; more emphasis on integrated treatments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Key actors and stakeholders</strong></td>
<td>National and local government; private sector developers and contractors; Emphasis on local and site levels</td>
<td>Move towards a greater balance between public and private sectors Regional level of activity emerged</td>
<td>Growing role of private sector and decentralization in local government; in early 1980s focus on site; later emphasis on local level</td>
<td>Emphasis on private sector and special agencies; growth of partnerships; Partnership the dominant approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spatial level of activity</strong></td>
<td>Emphasis on local and site levels</td>
<td>Regional level of activity emerged</td>
<td>Regional and local levels initially; later more local emphasis</td>
<td>Introduction of strategic perspective; growth of regional activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic focus</strong></td>
<td>Public sector investment with some private sector involvement</td>
<td>Continuing from 1950s with growing influence of private investment</td>
<td>Resource constraints in public sector and growth of private investment</td>
<td>Private sector dominant with selective public funds</td>
<td>Greater balance between public, private and voluntary funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social content</strong></td>
<td>Improving of housing and living standards</td>
<td>Social and welfare improvement</td>
<td>Community-based action and greater empowerment</td>
<td>Community self-help with very selective state support</td>
<td>Emphasis on the role of community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical emphasis</strong></td>
<td>Replacement of inner areas and peripheral development</td>
<td>Some continuation from 1950s with parallel rehabilitation of existing areas</td>
<td>More extensive renewal of older urban areas</td>
<td>Major schemes of replacement and new development; flagship schemes</td>
<td>More modest than 1980s; heritage and retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental approach</strong></td>
<td>Landscaping and some greening</td>
<td>Selective improvements</td>
<td>Environmental improvements with some innovations</td>
<td>Growth of concern for wider approach to environment</td>
<td>Introduction of broader idea of environmental sustainability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 The evolution of urban regeneration in the UK
Adapted from Roberts (2000, p.14).
Regarding this urban movement, Hall (2000) claimed that cultural or creative industries could provide the basis for economic regeneration. Moreover, Landry and Bianchini (1995, p.10) perceive creativity as capable of “bringing something into existence, generating, inventing, dealing imaginatively with seemingly intractable problems.”

Waits (2001, p.5–8) identified several demographic, cultural and business trends in the US that reveal a new possibility for urban centers. The demographic and cultural trends comprised: (i) expertise and diversity, with young talent, yuppie baby boomers and immigrants driving regional success, (ii) the importance of place, (iii) the scramble for talent. And the business trends identified were: (i) the footloose economy, (ii) the proximity and local factors matter more, (iii) the economy is splintering into ever-smaller and more specialized pieces, and (iv) the technological revolution has a soft side focused primarily on creatively driven fields such as media, fashion, advertising and design.

Urban cores were likely to benefit the most from this trend towards more creativity because they are essentially good places to find what the experts recognize as three components of creativity: “expertise, diversity, and interaction” (Waits, 2001). Several authors anticipated a “SoHo syndrome” of spontaneous and positive urban change capable of nurturing new businesses in the arts and beyond and at the same time regenerating old downtown areas (Gratz and Mintz, 1998; Zukin, 2014). While others argued that urban regeneration could be driven by cultural policy imperatives with many economic, social and cultural benefits (Landry, 1996). Although, the first three historical phases were relatively consensual, the sustainable and creative city is still very much with us. Table 3 shows a thematic and conceptual approach to approximately hundred years of downtown evolution.

PART II – The Special Issue’s History and Rationale

The U.S. – Japan Research Collaboration

The history of this special issue is rather all-encompassing and it involves two symposia (Tempe, AZ and Albany, NY), and various study tours and residency periods in Japan. Our interest in Japanese urban development and planning resulted from the realization that some earlier academic works had attempted to established international comparisons by placing Japan within the context of Europe and North-America (Sorensen et al., 2004), with a few direct comparative analyses between Japan and the United States. These included public space research in highly dense metropolitan areas of Tokyo and New York (Cybriwsky, 1999), relatively spread-out environments in Toyokawa and Cupertino, CA (Gaubatz, 2004),
and urban transitions at the city and metropolitan scales in New York and Tokyo (Marcotullio et al., 2005).

In 2005, the I Symposium on Sustainable Urban Regeneration in Japan took place at Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe. Apparently, the only thing in common between the two dissimilar geophilosophical contexts was friendship, in the form of a Japanese Friendship Garden built in downtown Phoenix on top of a depressed stretch of the I–10 highway. The symposium was intended to broaden that friendship by establishing academic networks between colleagues in the U.S. Southwest and in Japan. As one of the main lessons from the three-continent comparison conducted by Sorensen et al. (2004) was the need to promote more sustainable development in the United States, address social issues associated with urban shrinkage in Japan, and ensure the continuation of compact development typical of European cities.

Table 3 The four faces of downtowns
Adapted from Waits (2001, p.12).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic identity</th>
<th>Industrial 1940s–60s</th>
<th>Retail/Service 1960s–70s</th>
<th>Entertainment 1980s–90s</th>
<th>Creative 1990s–2010s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main customers</td>
<td>Place to make and move goods</td>
<td>Place for commerce and goods</td>
<td>Place to visit for fun or access special services</td>
<td>Place to create and incubate new knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Factories, Fortune 500, blue-collar workers</td>
<td>Real estate developers, mom and pop stores, retail centers</td>
<td>Suburban families, tourists, conventions, business people looking for special services</td>
<td>Knowledge workers, Entrepreneurs, Universities, information-based services, artists</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Key amenities     | Large land parcels, Low transportation costs, Freeways, rail or waterways | High rises, shopping centers, parking | Big stadiums, entertainment complexes, museums/zoos, parking | Cultural diversity, night life, networks, fiber optics, mixed use, compactness, density |
| Downtown leadership | Competes for manufactures | Competes for real estate and big retail | Competes for big sports teams, retail, and entertainment facilities | Competes for talent, soft technology firms, and smaller-scale amenities |
| Success measures  | Fortune 500s, job gain | Sales tax revenue, corporate headquarters, job gain | Event attendance, sales tax revenue, lively atmosphere, residential gain | Start-ups, entrepreneurs, high-education level, residential gain, coolness, 24/7 access |
The symposium was a gathering of colleagues mostly from ASU’s College of Architecture and Environmental Design. We benefited from two lectures by an assistant professor at the University of Tokyo (and visiting professor at Portland State University). The symposium also benefited from recent visits to Japan by one of the symposium organizers and from ongoing collaborations between faculty at ASU and at the University of Tokyo, Tokyo Institute of Technology, and Chiba University.

The contrasts between the low density, auto-dominated landscapes of the Arizona Southwest and the crowded, but vibrant people’s places shown to participants was revealing and illuminating. The multitude of topics ranged from personal accounts of life and work in both Japan and Arizona by a now resident of Phoenix Japanese assistant professor, to an array of housing typologies, shotengai (commercial main streets), shopping centers, parks and open spaces, campus planning, infill redevelopment, transportation planning and light rail development, and zoning and form-based codes. Besides the visit to the mixed-use development nodes, we also visited Sun City in Maricopa County, a retirement community per excellence, given the parallel phenomenon of the aging of the Japanese population. We have no pretense of claiming that a small symposium had any impact in the turn of events just prior to the global financial crisis (GFC) (2008–2010); nonetheless we do believe that it created some awareness of other more “sustainable urbanization models,” such as those corresponding to the Sustainable and Creative City examined in Part I of this paper (and summarily synthesized in Table 3 above) being already implemented elsewhere in the world. A considerable number of real estate professionals in attendance proved to us that the gathering was more than a simple academic symposium and that professionals were interested in learning alternative ways of urbanizing the Phoenix metropolis based partly on best practices from overseas.

Several of the up-to-the-early-2000s urban regeneration initiatives analyzed in Part I of this paper had also been shyly attempted locally, with a time lag and a southwestern bend to them. Those innovative regeneration practices were visible to the mostly Japanese study tour participants when we left the conference venue to explore the metropolis. Among these, it is important to mention the 24th Street and Camelback Avenue Phoenix’s sub-centrality; the Papago Park (Phoenix’s equivalent to Manhattan’s Central Park); and downtown Tempe’s and downtown Scottsdale’s historic districts – the truly exceptional oasis’ assets in the metropolis sea of desert sprawl. Furthermore, as the GFC coincided with the construction of a light-rail connecting the cities of Phoenix, Tempe, and Mesa in the core of the metropolis, it
brought a complete reverse of real estate fortunes (a phenomenon shorter in time but almost similar in intensity to the Japanese “lost decade” (Edgington, 2003)), which manifested itself in an inversion of the typical urban development model bringing fringe development to a halt and replacing it with centrally located infill transit-oriented (re)development (TOD), new housing typologies, and the closure of drive-thrus in the new TOD planning areas. Said market inversion also brought renewed attention to the Phoenix core with the expansion of the ASU Downtown Campus and the Phoenix Convention Center, the relocation of the city’s civic space, and the launching of various other sustainable urban revitalization programs (Balsas, 2017).

Following the symposium, in 2007 we were invited to participate in a conference on Sustainable Urban Regeneration at the University of Tokyo (UoT). The conference was organized by the Center for Sustainable Urban Regeneration (cSUR) at UoT, which organized a whole series of international conferences covering a broad range of urban and regional planning, land management, vulnerability, technology, and data infrastructure topics not only in Asia (Figure 4) but literally throughout the world, with case studies from mostly European and North-American countries. Those conferences resulted in the Springer cSUR-UT Series: Library for Sustainable Urban Regeneration, which published 10 edited volumes (2008–2011), of which Kidokoro et al. (2008) focused specifically on Sustainable Urban Regeneration in Asia, Europe and the United States.

While the I Symposium on Sustainable Urban Regeneration in Japan comprised comparisons and discussions between real and or perceived unsustainable environments in the United States and Japan, given Albany’s proximity to New York City, the II Symposium on Sustainable Urban Regeneration in Japan in 2017 was intended to look at large city comparisons and discussions. Our new geographic settings enabled us to reflect on the parallels and differences between Japan and the U.S., with special emphasis to countryside/rural preservation, metropolitan small and medium size urbanization, natural disaster preparedness and recovery, societal and demographic developments (e.g., aging and low birth rate), shrinking and urban regeneration, consumption, megalopolis transformations, urban and regional planning, and territorial infrastructure development.

The goals of the second symposium included: (i) to understand and explore various sources of Japanese tradition, (ii) to acquire knowledge of Japanese urbanism, sustainable development and urban regeneration, (iii) to foster an appreciation for cultural development in Japan, and finally, (iv) to expose participants to Japanese culture and some of the country’s latest societal developments. The format was relatively similar to that of the first symposium
with formal presentations, discussions and a field visit. Although we had less interest from the real estate community in Albany, various participants were actively engaged with different aspects of community development, what in Japan is known as *Machizukuri*. The field visit was to the Massachusetts Clark Art Institute Museum in nearby Williamstown in the Berkshires, where we learned about XVIIth – XIXth centuries Japanese Woodblock Printing (*Ukiyo-e*).

**Figure 4 Urban Redevelopment in Tokyo**  
Author’s archive (2007)

The **Special Issue on Placemaking and Sustainable Urban Regeneration**

Following the two symposia described above, the articles featured in the Special Issue were written by non-Japanese scholars and professionals who have studied Japanese urban planning and urban transformations diligently and *in loco* during short and medium time assignments in the country. Even though they constitute mostly western views on a foreign territory; they attempt to help ameliorate some of the issues faced by a “Struggling Giant” (Kantor *et al.*, 2012), and help to resolve what Carmona and Sakai (2014, p.186) has called “an individual aesthetic and a collective neglect,” when referring to the Japanese city.

This special issue comprises four articles organized in three sections. Section One is about urban regeneration and climate change in the cities of Toyama and Kanazawa (Balaban and Puppim de Oliveira, 2021). The authors show how these two Japanese cities utilized sustainable mobility policies and programs to create more livable neighborhoods. Section
Two analyzes recent urban development in one of Tokyo’s most emblematic districts: Shibuya. Shibuya, a neighborhood turned famous by the Hachiko movie (2009), is known for its large multidirectional traffic scrambling for pedestrians, its department stores, bars, restaurants and love hotels, all anchored to a certain extent by the multimodal train station – the true centrality of the neighborhood. Reggiani (2021) discusses the latest developments in Shibuya such as the daylighting of the Shibuya River and the expansion of the train station, which have led to a visible increase in the urban density and cachet of the district. The two articles in the Third section address placemaking and pastoral park planning (Davidson, 2021), and sustainable infrastructure planning (Santos, 2021). To sum up the various contributions to the special issue, the first paper introduces readers to regional tendencies in the urban regeneration of shrinking cities, the second focuses exclusively on a particular neighborhood in Tokyo, and the third set of papers covers distinct urbanistic aspects of Tokyo’s sustainability and hybridity. The Herberger Center for Design Research at ASU and the Japanese Chamber of Commerce and Industry of New York provided funding for the organization of the two symposia which led to this special issue.

Conclusion

The main objective of this literature review was to provide a historical and conceptual background to the way governments in different parts of the world have intervened in the public realm. The review focused mostly on urban regeneration interventions in two main countries, the US and the UK. The main differences pertain to questions of the age of the cities, natural features and urban phenomena, man-induced occurrences, population growth rates, amounts of land available for development, and above all normative public policies.

In spite of all these differences, it is still possible to identify various similarities. Carmon (1999, p.145) claimed that “the similarities [were] attributed to international policy transfer, but a larger extent to similarities in the socioeconomic and sociopolitical developments in Western countries, particularly after WWII.” In addition, it is important to recognize that European policymakers have greatly emulated US models as well. To conclude, the history of planning city centers appears to be largely a response to urbanization and the problems it has brought forward.

Fortunately, we are increasingly seeing more prolific urban planning scholarship in English by native Japanese academics (e.g., Hattori, 2011; To and Chong, 2017) exploring placemaking and urban regeneration tendencies. The set of papers in the special issue constitute yet another attempt at strengthening the theoretical and practical foundations which
ought to more than create new knowledge, help shaken the resolve displayed in Kurosawa’s immemorial IKIRU film (1952/2015).

This is more pressing at the beginning of the third decade of the XXIst century when Japan has just hosted the 2021 Summer Olympic Games (Murakami Wood and Abe, 2011) and experience tells us that the euphoria that comes with such mega-events is rather temporary. Balanced placemaking will be increasingly needed once the place-marketing effects of the mega-event begin to fade away (Friedmann, 2010). Participatory and integrated Machizukuri (Kusakabe, 2013) will be increasingly needed to address the contemporary problems posed by an aging and increasingly childless society (Kotkin and Modarres, 2013; Heidt, 2017); a countryside experiencing depopulation, degrowth and shrinking (Buhnik, 2017; Ortiz-Moya, 2020); altered weather patterns and global warming (DeWitt, 2013), and increasingly congested and unequal metropolitan cities (Chiavacci and Hommerich, 2016; Roth, 2016). While this special issue maybe only a small contribution to the complex balance of forces that has created these wicked problems in the now fully globalized and networked Japanese society, we offer it wholeheartedly in the fashion of Watanabe’s protesters placemaking phronesis.

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