

OFFICE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN A
LARGE CITY

(Deutsche Zusammenfassung siehe S. 16)

Introduction

This paper describes some research which was carried out at the Joint Unit for Planning Research of the University of London, between 1964 and 1967. A full account of this work will be published by Messrs. Heinemann during 1969; so that the present paper only sketches in the outlines of the work. However, I hope it will be sufficient to give a general idea of our approach.

Imagine that all the buildings in the city were arrayed before us, in a single line. We should see an immense variety of structures of all kinds, shapes and sizes. Some of these buildings will be suitable for only a very few activities. Concert halls, for example, are really only able to accommodate a small variety of activities. Other buildings can house a variety of activities. Georgian town houses may be used by single families, flats, small offices, factories or many other activities. Thus we might re-arrange our array of accommodation so that at one extreme we have very "highly specialized" accommodation while at the other end of the array there are buildings which can house a great variety of activities, they are "non specialized".

We could arrange the activities of the city in a similar fashion. We could identify those activities requiring a very special kind of accommodation such as symphony concerts, and those which are much less "specialized" in their requirements; for example offices can be accommodated in new office blocks, old houses or many other building types.

We have erected two arrays. On one hand we have an array of buildings, while on the other an array of activities. In one way or another these two arrays match each other, and the degree of fit between them offers us some measure of the working efficiency of the city. Each of the arrays is continually growing and changing, both as a whole and in the balance between the parts, and the arrays do not change at the same rate.

The array of buildings or structural stock changes as new buildings are constructed, existing ones adapted, and old ones demolished and replaced. The rate of change in structural stock may accelerate or decelerate over time,

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according to general economic cycles and trends, local demands for a particular type of building, or political decisions. But because of the fairly permanent nature of buildings and the cost of adapting, demolishing or rebuilding them, changes in the "structural stock" of a city occur fairly slowly.

Changes in the activity patterns of a city occur more quickly. Indeed it is partly the ability of cities to accommodate rapid changes in activities which gives them their special place in the pattern of social life. Sometimes changes in the activity pattern will require the adaptation of existing accommodation from one type to another but in any case we have all observed the rapidly changing stream of social life in our cities.

The array of structural stock changes more slowly than the array of activities which flows through it. There is a lag between stock and activities which gives rise to both costs and benefits in the work, shape and life of the city. But the pattern is more complex than this, for accommodation is fixed while activities are more mobile. And the requirements of activities will vary in respect of location and type of accommodation. For some kinds of activities the type of accommodation will be all important, whereas for others location will take precedence over accommodation.

This whole process is acted upon by public controls. In the early days of the growth of cities the original pattern may represent the outcome of entirely private choices, but public controls are soon imposed upon the privately chosen arrays of stock. As the original "free market" pattern of stock decays it is replaced by new accommodation, which has been constructed within the framework of public control, and this becomes the basis of choice for later activities.

The matching between the arrays of accommodation and activities is affected by the behaviour of certain sets of "actors" in the urban scene. First of all we have the "providers" of accommodation. Those who construct building stock, sometimes for their own occupation but very often for occupation for others. Next there are the "occupiers" of accommodation, those who take up the space provided and who must choose between the array