

Theories of planning and planning thinkers

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1 Patrick Geddes: place–work–folk, survey before plan and conservative surgery

Patrick Geddes, a Scottish biologist, taught that a town must be studied as a living whole of place, work and folk before it is planned, and that old towns should be improved by careful, minimal "conservative surgery" rather than wholesale clearance.

Core facts

- **Patrick Geddes** (1854–1932): Scottish biologist, sociologist and town planner.
- Often called the **father of modern town planning** and of **regional planning**.
- **Place–Work–Folk**: his triad for studying a settlement.
 - Adapted from the French sociologist **Frédéric Le Play**'s *Lieu–Travail–Famille* (place, work, family).
 - Place = environment; Work = economy; Folk = people and society.
- **Survey before plan**: the sequence **Survey** → **Analysis** → **Plan**.
- **Cities in Evolution** (1915): his main book on cities.
- He coined the term **conurbation** in *Cities in Evolution* (1915).
- **Conservative surgery**: improve a congested old town by removing only the worst buildings and opening courtyards and lanes, keeping the existing street fabric and community.
- **India**: worked in India from **1914**; wrote reports on many Indian towns, including **Indore (1918)**.
- **Outlook Tower**, Edinburgh: his "sociological laboratory" for regional survey.
- His disciple **Lewis Mumford** spread his ideas in America.

Explained

The Geddesian triad

Geddes	Le Play	Meaning for a planner
Place	Lieu	Land, climate, site and natural resources
Work	Travail	Occupations, economy, livelihood
Folk	Famille	People, families, social groups and culture

Geddes held that the three act on one another. A plan that changes one (for example, a new road through a market) changes the other two.

Survey before plan

- A planner must first make a detailed **civic and regional survey**: history, geography, economy, housing, health, social life.
- Only after analysing the survey should a plan be drawn.

- This is the root of today's planning process. Existing land-use surveys before a Development Plan under the MRTTP Act follow the same logic.

The valley section

- A diagram of a river valley from the hills to the sea.
- Each zone has a typical occupation: miner, woodman, hunter, shepherd, peasant, gardener, fisherman.
- Lesson: settlements depend on their region. Town and country must be planned together. This made Geddes a founder of **regional planning**.

Conservative surgery in Indian towns

- British practice in Indian towns favoured large-scale demolition and straight roads after plague and congestion.
- Geddes opposed this. He walked the lanes, mapped them, and proposed removing only decayed houses.
- The cleared plots became small open spaces, wells, trees and shrines. Residents stayed in their neighbourhood.
- His Indore report (1918) is the best-known example. He also used civic festivals and processions to involve citizens.

Other key terms

- **Conurbation**: towns that grow outward until they merge into one continuous built-up area (his examples included Greater London and Lancashire).
- **Paleotechnic** and **neotechnic** eras: the coal-and-smoke industrial age versus a cleaner age of electricity and better planning.

Common traps

✗ "Place-Work-Folk was derived from Ebenezer Howard." ✓ It was adapted from **Frédéric Le Play's** Lieu-Travail-Famille.

✗ "Lewis Mumford coined 'conurbation.'" ✓ **Geddes** coined it in *Cities in Evolution* (1915). Mumford was his disciple.

✗ "Conservative surgery means demolishing the whole old area and rebuilding it." ✓ It means **minimal, selective removal** of the worst buildings, keeping the street fabric.

✗ "Cities in Evolution was written by Howard in 1898." ✓ It is by **Geddes (1915)**. Howard's 1898 book is *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*.

✗ "Geddes' sequence is Plan → Survey → Analysis." ✓ It is **Survey → Analysis → Plan**.

Quick revision

- Geddes (1854-1932), Scottish biologist; father of modern town and regional planning.

- Triad: Place–Work–Folk (from Le Play's Lieu–Travail–Famille).
- Survey → Analysis → Plan.
- Cities in Evolution, 1915; coined "conurbation".
- Conservative surgery: minimal demolition in old towns.
- Indore report, 1918; worked in India from 1914.
- Valley section: region shapes settlement and occupation.
- Outlook Tower, Edinburgh.
- Disciple: Lewis Mumford.