



## A republic of garden city-states on which the sun never sets: Auguste Comte and Richard Congreve's urban-regional vision

Matthew Wilson\*

\* Ball State University, [MRWilson@BSU.edu](mailto:MRWilson@BSU.edu)

From the mid 1850s and into the interwar period a little-known group of citizen-sociologists attempted to break up the British Empire and establish a proto- garden-city-state network. These actors were the followers of the French Positivist philosopher Auguste Comte and his British acolyte Richard Congreve. Comte introduced the modern science of sociology, the Religion of Humanity, and the utopia called the Occidental Republic. After setting out the socio-spatial character of this utopia, this study will argue that from the 1850s the former Oxford don and ex-Anglican minister Richard Congreve advocated Comte's principles as British international and national policy. I will contend that Congreve's affiliates formed an organised resistance to imperialism, exploitation, poverty, and despondency. They created urban interventions or Positivist institutes, led ad hoc sociological surveys, and published programmes for realising regional republics. This essay contributes to our understanding of how Positivist sociology was a eutopian spatial design practice rooted in creating a comprehensive and participatory moral, cultural and intellectual network for the life virtuous. If we require some alternative to religious fanaticism, political lethargy, provincialism, fake news and right-wing reaction, the praxis explored herein might serve as a precedent for ethical, political and collectivist spatial agency.

**Keywords:** urban visions, comprehensive planning, sociology, positivism, garden cities, humanism

### Introduction

By the early twentieth century, Britain had forged a congeries of colonial outposts comprising 57 million people within a territory of 95 million square kilometres. It was hailed as the "empire on which the sun never sets." Historians of political thought have suggested that there were few if any critics of the British Empire until the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Yet from the mid 1850s a little-known group of citizen-sociologists emerged as a cogent polemical force against aggression abroad. These actors, I argue, sought to break up the British Empire and, in turn, establish idyllic real regions or utopias. They were the followers of the French philosopher Auguste Comte, the Positivist thinker who introduced the modern science of sociology and the republican<sup>2</sup> Religion of Humanity. Together this science and religion served as the basis for a utopia called the Occidental Republic, which, I contend, was akin to the establishment of a global network of garden city-states. After setting out the socio-spatial character and qualities of the sovereign republics nested within this utopia, it will be shown that from the 1850s Comte's British followers, who were led by the Oxford don and ex-Anglican minister Richard Congreve, implemented a sociological practice for reconstructing international, national and regional affairs.

Using an intellectual history method, this essay will argue that through to the interwar period Congreve's followers — Frederic Harrison, Charles Booth, Patrick Geddes, and Victor Branford — made a cogent attempt to realise Comte's vision. Much to the consternation of the church, state, and landed aristocracy they polemicised against imperialism, industrial exploitation, poverty, and despondency. They built on Comte and Congreve's historical-geographical surveys by leading industrial, social, civic, and rustic types of surveys to evaluate the nature of social life. They organised urban interventions (Positivist schools, lecture halls, churches, and civic societies) as educational nodes and community-action centres, where they fleshed out programmes and manifestos offering systematic counsel for transforming chaotic conurbations into independent, eutopian communities. For these Positivists, planning was not a bureaucratic, materialist practice of setting out plots, roads, trees, and pavements. It was a human-centred and process-focused practice seeking to create a comprehensive political, cultural, and intellectual network for the life virtuous.

Recent studies by Scott and Bromley, Young and Clavel, Bowie, Egbert, and others have covered the radical and socialist tradition of British sociology and planning but, barring accounts of Geddes and Branford, organised Positivism has remained neglected.<sup>3</sup> Notwithstanding the system of thought captured the imagination of well-regarded social reformers, physicians, scientists, philosophers, literary savants, and trade unionists.<sup>4</sup> The emergence of the modern metropolis was the result of the coordinated contributions of such actors. The urbanist Edward Soja has argued that Comte's long-forgotten utopian "manifesto" spurred this activity. It forecast how the cooperation of various practitioners led to the realisation of a vast number of metropolises, which were "elaborated, diffused and reinvented all over the world" during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>5</sup> The basic template



here, arguably, was the garden city as a self-sufficient unit.<sup>6</sup> The Positivists were central to preparing and furthering this discourse for the small planned state through their political polemics, sociological surveys and programmes for eutopian social reorganisation.

### International policy for republics or city-states

In their age of revolution, empire and capital the Positivists believed that modern civilisation was on the cusp of radical change. Modern humanism opens with the founding father of social democracy and Positivism, Henri de Saint-Simon (1760–1825). He envisioned several transnational urban infrastructural projects and the emergence of a “meritocratic, managerial, free-market society.”<sup>7</sup> While he was the secretary to Saint-Simon, Comte developed historical sociological surveys of western society which pointed to the rise of this “positive era.” They traced the withering-away of monotheistic and monarchic powers since the medieval period; science and industry, they proclaimed, were the new “spiritual and temporal” power structures of modernity. A “Newtonian elite” of scientists could assume the role of the “papal and theological” power. What was needed, however, was a “positive doctrine” based on a hierarchical classification of the human and natural “sciences of observation.”<sup>8</sup> With such a doctrine, this scientific elite could coordinate the activities of moral, social and political affairs. What was missing was the positive science of society, which Saint-Simon outlined under the rubric “social physiology.” Along this vein, in the wake of the July Revolution, Comte introduced in his famous *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (1830–6) the “master-science” of sociology.<sup>9</sup> Sociology, alongside morality, would constitute the two premier disciplines within his classification of the sciences.<sup>10</sup> By the 1848 Revolution, Comte had established the Positivist Society and the Religion of Humanity. Positivist sociologists, Comte declared, could spur a “moral revolution” to answer the “question of modern times,” the “incorporation of Woman and the Proletariate [sic] into Modern Culture.”<sup>11</sup>

Comte’s magnum opus, the *System of Positive Polity* (1851–1854), detailed a utopia-planning manifesto called the Occidental Republic. It included a new calendar, cultural festivals, regional currencies, banking system, ethical codes, and a flag system, which the British Positivists would emulate. This utopia would come to fruition beginning with an international peace pact in which all nations agree to return their colonial exploits. Each nation would install a dictatorship of the proletariat, which would be counselled by the Positivist Society; the society would serve as the critical-regional spatial agency for the Positive Era by creating a network of Positivist halls in town and country. Such urban interventions would coordinate the organisation of public life in the modern city-region. As the hub of the local community and catalyst for structured social change, each intervention was to act as a centre for regional sociology, institute of humanist scholarship, and republican hall of social activism. Part of the activities here would include social investigations for regional place-making, in which the people determine the look, feel and function of the built environment.<sup>12</sup> These community-centres would thus offer a gamut of educational and cultural activities to establish in each region the Positivist mentality. The national dictatorship, meanwhile, would dissolve after the emergence of a new generation of “moral capitalists”; from this generation, newly-formed regional city-states would form and elect their commerce, manufacturing, and agriculture chiefs. Only the “spiritual” Positivist societies would link together the separate republics as an Occidental Republic.

Comte wildly believed that the Occidental Republic would comprise, within a century’s time, five-hundred modern, peaceful, greenbelt city-communities. Each republic would have the character of a small salubrious region with a clear distinction but tight interrelationships between the urban and the rural. With a land area comparable to Belgium, each republic would contain around two million people.<sup>13</sup> For the Positivists, the utopian “spirit of devotion to the public welfare” could only be kindled in republics of such a limited spatial scale. It would facilitate a particular type of private and public life with places that, in the Aristotelian sense, enable all to live the good life.<sup>14</sup> To encourage participatory forms of spatial production, Comte suggested that different architectural types signalled social power for ruling in turn. Here, two “spiritual types” called “Intellectuals” (i.e. sociologists, physicians, philosophers) and “Emotionals” (artists, teachers, mothers) would hold social power within universities, schools, hospitals, salons, and homes.<sup>15</sup> Two “temporal types” called “Chiefs” (bankers, barristers, industrialists) and “People” (unionised masons, crafters, factoryworkers) would maintain obligations to business and politics in spaces such as banks, factories, fields, workshops, and union halls. All citizens as such would hold functionally differentiated roles in the cooperative process of producing the urban social fabric of the republic, as a form of “positivist republicanism.”<sup>16</sup> (Comte also maintained that together the community would decide the unique look and feel of the city, where Positivist institutions would stand at the centre of civic life.)

The key protagonist who presented Positivism in this light was the Aristotelian scholar, Richard Congreve (1818–99). He established organised Positivism in Britain and was the first to promote Comte’s utopia as a critique of British foreign policy. Without his efforts, organised British Positivism would not exist and would not have treated Comte’s ideas as “spatial formulae” for a “realisable utopia.”<sup>17</sup> It was on seeing Comte’s *Catechism of Positive Religion* (1852) that Congreve, then an Oxford don and Anglican minister, decided to abandon “everything, for the sake of the truth.”<sup>18</sup> He produced sociological surveys rooted in historical-geographical analyses that tested Comte’s sociological laws about the rise and fall of empires and the “spiritual powers” of



Europe. (He promoted the use of a “map without names” to diagnose and treat international relations, and he balked at the study of “English History from a purely national point of view.”<sup>19</sup>) Like Saint-Simon and Comte, Congreve’s early works praised the “admirable utopias” of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, namely Henry IV’s plan for a Christian republic and the Abbé de Saint-Pierre’s Project for Perpetual Peace.<sup>20</sup> Henry IV’s plan, he noted, captured the sympathy of Elizabeth, the queen of England. It aimed at “ordering the states of Europe in one great federal system, the Republic of the West [Occidental Republic], a modification of the policy of Charlemagne.”<sup>21</sup> Congreve proceeded to suggest that France and England, then allied in the Crimean War, should act as the “spiritual” leaders of Europe. Like Comte, he demanded they return their colonial exploits, refrain from conflict and uricide, and devolve their nation-states into sets of regional city-states.<sup>22</sup> Congreve clarified that sociology was to serve as the “guide or type for the *re-organisation of society*”; it was an applied ethical science for urban-social planning.<sup>23</sup> Sociology, as such, was of “direct political interest” to Victorian life, for the re-organisation of empires into “complete” regions.<sup>24</sup>

Congreve established the British Positivist Society in London in 1859, just two years after he gained instant infamy by publishing a succession of polemics against British affairs in Gibraltar and India. By establishing Chapel Street hall, he was following Comte’s vision for creating idyllic communities via urban intervention. From here he went on to defend the Paris commune, the Boers, the Afghans, the Jamaicans, and the Ugandans against foreign aggression. As Britain continued to annex various territories, he published a programme called “Systematic Policy.”<sup>25</sup> Based on his historical-geographical surveys, the programme proposed a guardianship of nations to facilitate pan-European devolution.<sup>26</sup> Positivist societies, which sprouted up across Britain, would also lead surveys for town and country improvements towards home rule. They would offer free secular education, civic rites of passage following the Religion of Humanity, art lessons, concerts, and festivals. Congreve’s Policy sought to moderate the powerful individualistic forces driving imperialism while establishing a collective sense of regional identity.<sup>27</sup> One of his primary agendas here was to unite trade unions, to approximate the “temporal” power of Comte’s utopia. Comte considered trade unionism as *the* “systematic connection with the socialist movement towards internal regeneration.”<sup>28</sup>

### Surveying national and social life

From the 1860s to the 1900s the barrister and Positivist sociologist, Frederic Harrison (1831–1923), sought to unite, vindicate, and coordinate workers under the banner of Positivism.<sup>29</sup> Harrison was introduced to the Positivist view of trade unions and the reconstruction of the city-region while assisting Congreve, his former Oxford tutor, with his recent sociological surveys. Whereas sociologists were the urban-regional planners and “spiritual power” of modernity, it was trade unionists that were to serve as the political core of “temporal power” of Comte’s utopia. For Comte and Harrison, trade unions were the modern equivalent of medieval guilds.<sup>30</sup> Guided by the medieval clergy, guilds provided the “constant sense of each citizen having his place in a complex whole.” Harrison praised Comte’s aim to establish a similar Positivist sociability with city-spaces replete with “centres of moral and spiritual education.”<sup>31</sup>

Yet, during Victorian times trade unions were considered a menace to society. During the 1860s “social war” between capital and labour Harrison, at Congreve’s urging for “social action,” set out on national industrial surveys. He documented working conditions, hours and wages, education, pastimes, beliefs, and living circumstances of trade unionists.<sup>32</sup> Publishing his findings in political newspapers and scientific and literary journals, Harrison aimed to legitimise, systematise and strengthen the institution of trade unionism.<sup>33</sup> In 1867, he was appointed to the Royal Commission on Trades Unionism, which questioned the legality of unions, their misuse of funds and affiliation to acts of violence.<sup>34</sup> Harrison contributed to the Minority Report which redeemed trade unions from criminal activities and made them independent and legally binding entities.<sup>35</sup> His recommendations, though not without modification, were the basis for trade union law from 1868 to 1906. For the next forty years in the very least, trade union leaders, notably George Potter, George Howell, and George Shipton, were known to seek out the Positivists’ counsel.<sup>36</sup> Like the relationship between the medieval clergy and guilds, the Positivists’ positioned themselves as independent intellectuals, and their advice was not always implemented.<sup>37</sup>

Owing to their support, the London Trades’ Council invited Harrison, Congreve and Beesly to deliver lectures at their meetings. Here, Harrison prompted trade unionists to re-orient the focus of the aristocracy away from offshore exploits to a civilising mission at home.<sup>38</sup> In response to the conservative “New Social Movement” of the 1870s, Harrison thereafter published a planning vision entitled “Our Social Programme.”<sup>39</sup> He recommended devolving England into a network of planned, regional industrial republics. Based on Congreve’s suggestions, Harrison’s remedy for national social problems was regional sociological investigations, followed by the national municipalisation of industry, the creation of a secular-humanist public education system, and regional cultural programmes.<sup>40</sup> The municipalisation of factories, post office and rail, road, bridge, harbour, pier, dock, and lighthouse were of paramount importance. A unionised workforce would furnish the capital to expedite urban



renovations; strike funds would finance mid-rise, mixed-use housing blocks, transport links, neighbourhood educational facilities, playgrounds, and civic spaces.<sup>41</sup> Harrison's social programme promoted regional reconstruction and "Home Rule All Around." He celebrated the Local Government Act of 1888 by producing writings that envisioned "Ideal London."<sup>42</sup> The London County Council soon thereafter appointed Harrison to design the Kingsway Boulevard, which permitted trade unionists to begin rebuilding the city. This was the first major urban intervention in London since Regent Street in 1820.<sup>43</sup> The scheme and its budget were an impetus to Ebenezer Howard's garden city vision.<sup>44</sup>

Meanwhile, the urban cartography of the Positivist sociologist Charles Booth (1840–1916) proved indispensable to various London improvement schemes, including Kingsway Boulevard. Booth's survey of London – covering poverty, industry, and religion – was a momentous extension of the Positivists' studies of spiritual and temporal powers. Under the influence of Congreve, Harrison, Vernon Lushington, and his cousins, Booth converted to Positivism.<sup>45</sup> As early as the 1870s, Booth was infatuated with Comte's scientific system of "benevolent intervention," and he and his cousins, Albert and Henry Crompton, were continually talking with Congreve about the Positivist utopia.<sup>46</sup> Booth wrote a little-known confession of adherence to the Religion of Humanity as well as a "Positivist Prayer," but more broadly he also published articles in defence of Comte's ideas in *The Colony*, his family's home journal.<sup>47</sup>

During the calamities of the 1880s, Harrison urged Booth to contribute to the social investigations of the Mansion House Committee. Witnessing severe distress, he sought to repay his "debt to humanity."<sup>48</sup> The successful steamship company chief became a "scientific sociologist" or Positivist Intellectual. Booth determined to use his resources to diagnose and treat the conditions of the "bitter outcast," the sick, elderly and the idle. His urban-regional social survey of London drew on the ideas of Comte as well as the empirical methods of the Saint-Simonian social scientist, Frédéric Le Play, and the industrial surveys of Harrison. From the 1880s to the 1900s, Booth and his team compiled regional studies on "urbanisms in embryo" and figures on housing conditions, redundancy, and old age, in attempts to form a complete picture of the urban-regional condition.<sup>49</sup> Although it is little-acknowledged, Booth's survey findings showed that overcrowding was the "evil," "the great cause of degeneracy," in London. And there were few means of escape. Overcrowding was the "source for demoralization" within the body politic. This "moral weakness" in the urban fabric, wrote Booth, "is the prolific, if not the main source of unemployment."<sup>50</sup>

From the 1890s through to the 1900s Booth sought to shape public consensus on a comprehensive programme of proposals called "Limited Socialism," which was a phrase he introduced in the first volumes of his London survey. First, Booth proposed the government set out a system of home colonies or new towns to decongest urban areas, to provide education and to encourage family life.<sup>51</sup> Next, and building on Harrison's efforts, he promoted "new unionism" for unifying skilled and unskilled labour; his Positivist colleagues celebrated this "socialist unionism" as a step in the direction of the true industrial "temporal power" of Positivism.<sup>52</sup> Similar to the ideas of Comte and Le Play, Booth thereafter proposed a system of old age pensions as a social safety net.<sup>53</sup> Lastly, his programme for Limited Socialism advocated for a new policy of infrastructural urbanism which, he imagined, would be managed by a new land development authority and would to attenuate speculative slum-building.<sup>54</sup> Effectively, Limited Socialism aimed to address the ethics of poor industrial, financial and urban land management.

### Regional and civic visions

The Scottish polymath Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) developed a regional survey method that addressed the severed links between town and country life. While a student of the evolutionary biologist Thomas Huxley, Geddes sought out Congreve at the Positivist Society in London.<sup>55</sup> He recalled Congreve's impact on him as a "revelation"; under Congreve's direction Geddes' early essays discussed the links between biology, community and economics.<sup>56</sup> Here Geddes suggested that the laws of biology provided the basis for establishing ethical regional communities. Collecting biological and social facts about the environment would enable one to index "natural wealth" and set out planning forecasts.<sup>57</sup>

Along these lines during the 1880s, Geddes led an "almost Positivist" Summer School in Edinburgh. It offered the "sociologic teaching" of outdoor education by way of regional surveys.<sup>58</sup> Students documented the lives of civic and rustic types of people, as outlined in Comte's and Le Play's works.<sup>59</sup> Following Comte and Congreve, Geddes held that Spiritual types, Emotionals and Intellectuals, would hold providence over educational and cultural spaces, as mentioned above; meanwhile, temporal types, or Chiefs and People, would maintain obligations to business and politics. The Positivists depicted Comte's civic types of the city as complementary to Le Play's rustic types of the countryside: miners, woodsmen, hunters, shepherds, peasants, farmers, and fishermen. These spiritual and temporal types would rule in turn in relation to their respective spaces within the city-region.

By the 1890s Geddes opened his Outlook Tower in Edinburgh. Here, Geddes exhibited the "sociological facts" collected during regional surveys. He called this exhibit an "Encyclopedia Civica," and it explained the past and



present of the people and their region. Its purpose was to inform planning schemes for harmonising individuals, institutions and the environment.<sup>60</sup> He held that a network of institutes like the Outlook Tower could plan regional wholes, foster inclusive public government and initiate imperial devolution. Along these lines Geddes employed this sociology before planning approach in response to the dilapidated dens of the Edinburgh Old Town as well as the refugee crisis in Cyprus.<sup>61</sup> Geddes also used the method and Positivist ideas about a “Church of the People”<sup>62</sup> for a scheme to transform the Scottish town of Dunfermline into a garden city-state.<sup>63</sup> Such projects rallied support for the Town Planning Act of 1909.<sup>64</sup>

Central to this discussion was Geddes’ idea of a sociological centre for “concrete politics” concerned with creating the city-region anew.<sup>65</sup> The primary purpose and significance of the Outlook Tower, Geddes reiterated at the Royal Institute of British Architects first Town Planning conference, was to operate as an *urban intervention*, a “civic observatory.”<sup>66</sup> A global network of such Civic Societies, or “Civicentre(s) for sociologist and citizen,” would energise and engage the public. It would exhibit the efforts of Howard as well as international planning innovators such as Josef Stübben, Camillo Sitte and Daniel Burnham; organise transnational tours of urban redevelopment projects; and praise foreign planning advances in the local press. These centres would lead regional surveys, publish investigations on human-ecological alienation and exploitation and, also, implement planning programmes—just as Congreve, Harrison, Booth and other Positivist society affiliates had.<sup>67</sup>

From the late 1890s Geddes’ partner Victor Branford (1863–1930) disseminated applied sociology for planning regional city-states throughout the British empire. He was the initiator of the first intellectual institution in Britain with the word “sociology” in its name, the Sociological Society.<sup>68</sup> Founded in 1904 the organisation furthered sociology as a modern academic discipline in association with the University of London, which was offering the first-ever sociology seminars in Britain. The society served as the meeting ground for economists, geographers, politicians, philosophers, and writers.<sup>69</sup> Here parties of eugenicists, town planners and ethical evolutionaries debated the meanings and methods of sociology. Scholars have attributed the immediate origins of the first party to the sociological works of Charles Darwin and Francis Galton (eugenicists), the second to Booth and Geddes (town planners) and the third to Herbert Spencer and Hobhouse (ethical evolutionaries).<sup>70</sup>

Branford and Positivist supporters were the leading advocates of the eutopian “town planning school” of sociology.<sup>71</sup> From the early 1900s to the 1920s Branford expounded a discipline called “City Design,” which he described as an “art of polity-making” that put ultimate emphasis on the unselfish-self as the sociological agent for social transformation. It called for something of a religious conversion, where idealists would employ civic sociology towards consensus-based place making.<sup>72</sup> Such ideas took shape with Branford’s explorations of the works of Comte, Ernest Mach and James Ward, which spurred him to consider ways in which to link science, faith and citizenship.<sup>73</sup> He later presented Geddes’ regional survey method as *the link — the “sacred way” — the process for self-actualisation and living the “good life” in an ideal city.*<sup>74</sup> As an ethical entrepreneur, Branford employed the regional survey for planning agricultural and industrial schemes in various South American outposts. Fixated on creating small states with the character of the Positive Era, his business ventures connected telephone, rail, road, waterway hubs, housing, and industries to cultural centres. Synthesising the ideas of Comte, Geddes, Thorstein Veblen and William MacDonald,<sup>75</sup> Branford suggested that City Design addressed the two competing psychologies of formalism and idealism. He controversially claimed that the Sociological Society was the omphalos of idealism and applied sociology.

During the great unrest of the 1910s, Branford encouraged idealists to form a “Religion of Idealism” and to promote the consolidation of cooperative-economics schemes to realise garden city projects. He and Geddes incorporated these ideas into their post-war reconstruction programme called the “Third Alternative.” Here the Bank of England and cooperative societies would finance the total reconstruction of the nation as the “moral equivalent of war” in which case moralised “banker-statesmen” could facilitate the “central concept of realisable ideals as regional Utopias.”<sup>76</sup> Like other Positivists he claimed that the post-war neotechnic era would comprise the government of women, where science and industry operate on the basis of the spirit of decentralised self-reliance and civic responsibility.<sup>77</sup>

Inspired by the American activist Charles Ferguson, Branford and Geddes proposed that “university militants,” could lead citizen-groups in regional surveys and propose, like Positivists before them, a “Policy of Culture” to resolve such problems as housing deficiencies, industrial gridlock, rural decline, and despondency to create a regional eutopia.<sup>78</sup> Like Comte’s Occidental Republic, they held that each region would also establish its own architectural language, currency, festivals, and thus provide an enhanced individual and social life suited to each locale.<sup>79</sup> The Third Alternative, in fact, offered a schema for the devolution of the British empire into an Occidental network of garden city-states. Here a worldwide regional university system, would provide practical education to craft guilds, thus making “City Design” initiatives possible. Thus, instead of a “Positivist Society” taking the lead, it was now the modern university. Its academics, they imagined, would arbitrate international and domestic affairs relating to industry and public life.<sup>80</sup> This vision of post-war reconstruction, Branford and Geddes



acknowledged, drew on Comte's "practical treatise," the *System of Positive Polity* and its utopia, the Occidental Republic.<sup>81</sup>

### Conclusion

In promoting the notion of creating self-sufficient, small republics the Positivists offered support for the concept of the town and country as a planned regional unit. Through their intellectual and cultural interventions, they upheld the notion that the school is the nucleus of community sociability and the means for broader social transformation. As such they held that the city-community is defined by its public spaces and civic institutes; and by promoting social action and civic duty via different types of sociological surveys for place-making, they introduced the notion of design-research as a form of activism in the creation of caring and socially-responsible citizens. Thus, seeking an alternative form of regional life, Comte and Congreve's followers used applied sociology to examine nested social problems, from the international level to the locality. Their work, as such, stands as an example of planning politics, where citizen-groups acted as an intellectual and practical alternative to imperialism and uricide.

### Tables and Figures

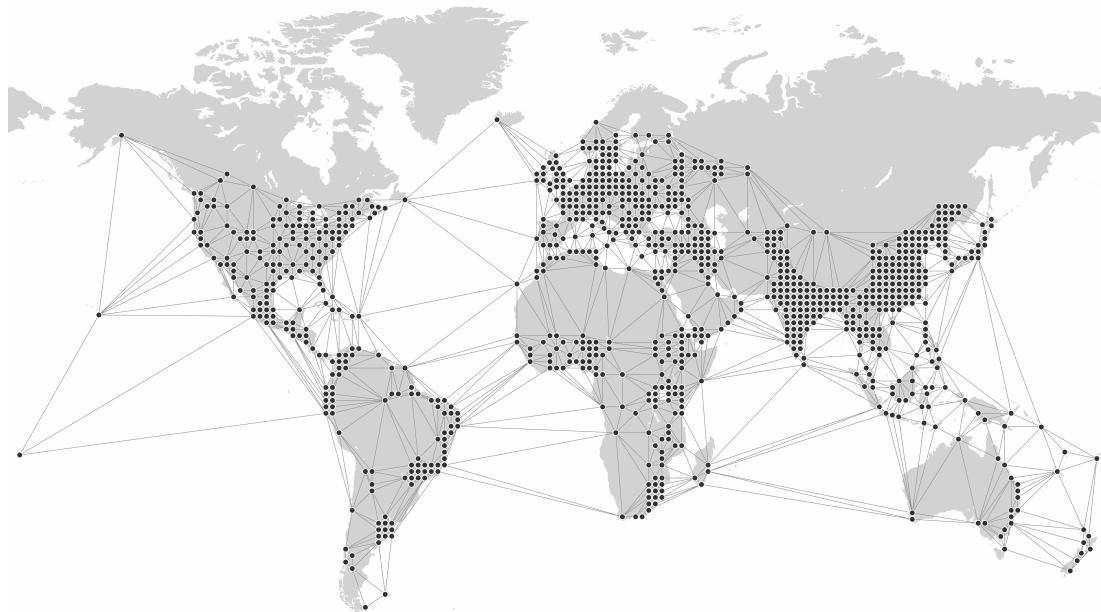


Figure 1: Speculative sketch of Comte's Occidental Republic, a garden city-state network. Here each circle contains the land area he prescribed. Rather than 500 circles as he envisioned, we see here 1000 circles arranged in relation to contemporary population densities of more than seventy people per square kilometre.

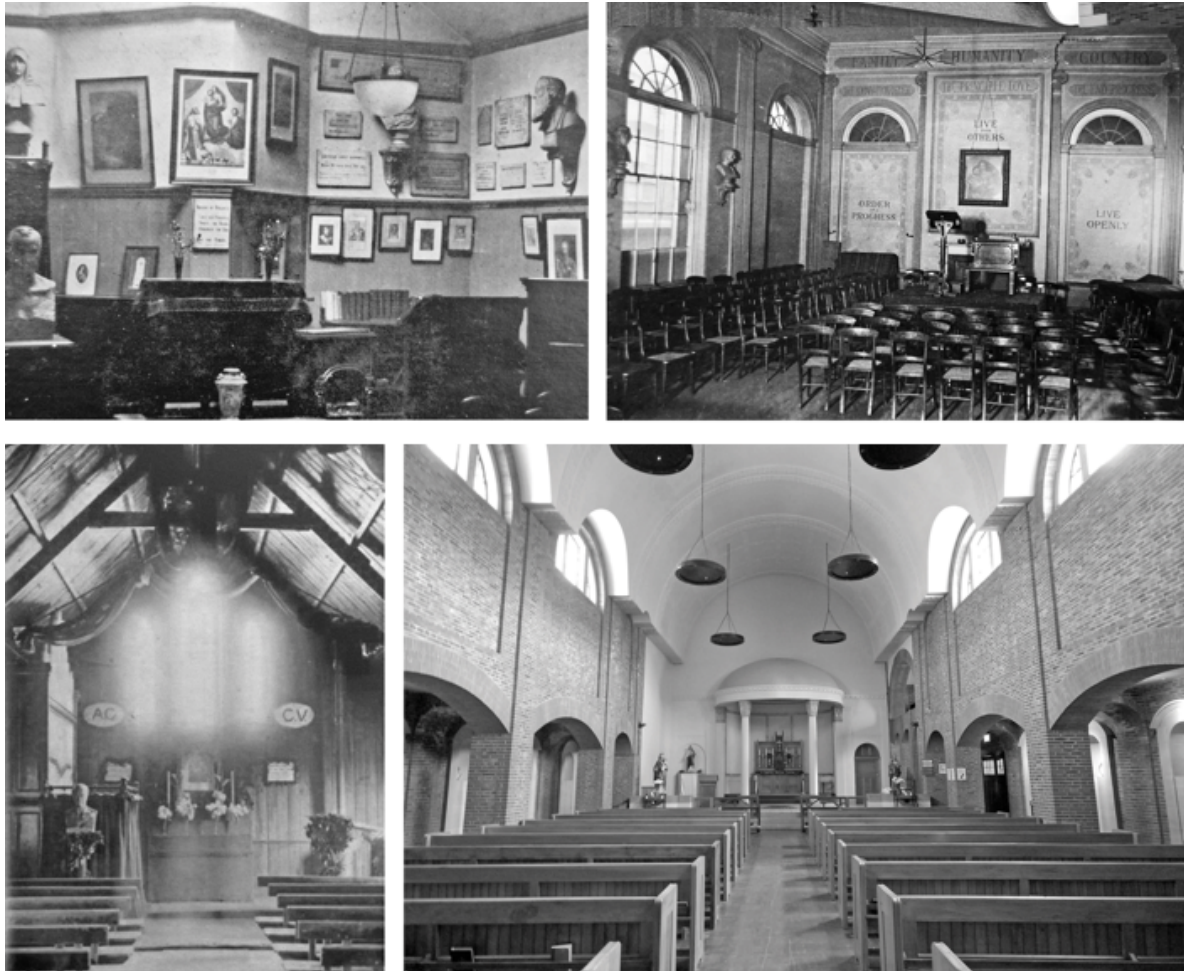


Figure 2: Positivist interventions. Chapel Street Hall, London (upper left); Newton Hall, London (upper right); and Church of Humanity, Newcastle (lower left) BLPES-LPS, 5/4; St. Pius X Church, formerly the Liverpool Church of Humanity (lower right).

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

### Notes on contributor(s)

Matthew Wilson is an intellectual historian and Assistant Professor at Ball State University, College of Architecture and Planning.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, L.T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); Porter, Bernard. *Critics of Empire* (London: Macmillan, 1968); Claeys, Gregory. *Imperial Sceptics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, 4 vols. Vol. I (London: Longmans, Green) 123–4; Henri Gouhier, *La Jeunesse d'Auguste Comte*, 3 vols. Vol. II (Paris: Vrin) 58–61; *ibid.*, III, 407. Within the *System*, Comte called the “true principle of republicanism,” a state where “all forces ... work together for the common good.” The proclamation of a republic, he maintained, meant that each citizen devotes “all his faculties” to “the public welfare.” The primary means through which he aimed to achieve this mode of republicanism was through the cultural celebrations of the Religion of Humanity. Henri Gouhier argues the Religion of Humanity was based on the secular religions of the French Revolution, which aimed to establish a new republican culture.

<sup>3</sup> John Scott and Ray Bromley, *Envisioning Sociology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013); Duncan Bowie, *The Radical and Socialist Tradition in British Planning* (London: Routledge, 2017); Robert Young and Pierre Clavel, eds. “Planning living cities: Patrick Geddes’ legacy in the new millennium.” Special issue, *Landscape and Urban Planning*; Peter Eisenman, “Post-Functionalism,” in *Theorizing a New Agenda for Architecture*, ed. Kate Nesbitt (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996). All of these studies largely neglect the Comtean impact on planning, but Eisenman presents Positivism as a movement of “ethical functionalism.” This paper draws on important connexions in the Eric Paul Mumford’s *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928–1960*, Donald Drew Egbert’s *Social Radicalism*



and the Arts, and Konstanze Sylva Domhardt's "The Garden City Idea in the CIAM discourse on Urbanism." These works show how Saint-Simon's and Ebenezer Howard's ideas influenced the global planning and design movement, Congrès internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM). The chief British intermediaries, I argue here, were Congreve's Positivists, who were attempting to approximate Comte's Occidental Republic. Egbert situates Congreve as central to the Positivist network theory of planning and the medieval revival in Victorian architecture. Aspects of Positivism, as a utopian theory and sociological practice, served as the impetus to and the activities of Sybella Gurney, H.V. Lanchester, Patrick Abercrombie, Lewis Mumford and Le Corbusier. It percolated into the efforts of the Sociological Society Cities Committee, the Le Play House, the Regional Planning Association of America and, as mentioned, CIAM.

<sup>4</sup> Iñaki Ábalos, *The Good Life* (Barcelona: Gili: 2001), 69–70; Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, 3 vols. Vol. III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 10; Thomas Dixon, *The Invention of Altruism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); T.R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66, 110, 219, 55; Edward R. Pease, *The History of the Fabian Society* (New York: Dutton, 1916), 18. Victorians found Positivism alluring because it upheld a "belief in universal regeneration to be brought about by the new "master-science" of sociology." This belief was expressed in terms of "an international level opposition to imperialism, and on a national scale raising the dignity of labour" via trade unionism. Comte's ardent follower, the polymath Frederic Harrison, claimed that Positivism was "at once a scheme of Education, a form of Religion, a school of Philosophy, a method of Government, and a phase of Socialism" founded on sociology. This essay uses this definition of Positivism.

<sup>5</sup> Edward W. Soja, *Postmetropolis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), xii–94.

<sup>6</sup> F.J. Osborn, *Green-Belt Cities* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1946), 39.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Rykwert, *The Seduction of Place* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 62.

<sup>8</sup> Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, *Oeuvres de Saint-Simon*, 6 vols. Vol. I (Paris: Dentu, 1868), 53, 210–4; Auguste Comte, *System*, IV, 500–2; Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, *Catéchisme des industriels*, 59; *Du système industriel*, iii–x, 22–62; *ibid*, 2e partie, 8–10.

<sup>9</sup> Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive*, 6 vols. Vol. IV, 294.

<sup>10</sup> Emile Durkheim, *Socialism* (New York: Collier, 1962), 134; Claude Henri de Saint-Simon, *Oeuvres*, IV, 11–96.

<sup>11</sup> Auguste Comte, *System*, III, 523; Victor Branford, *Outlines of the Sociology of London* (London: University of London), 14; C.G. Higginson, "The Incorporation of the Proletariate into Modern Society," *Positivist Review* (1897): 68–72.

<sup>12</sup> Auguste Comte, *Correspondance inédite d'Auguste Comte*, 4 vols. Vol. III (Paris: Société Positiviste, 1904), 326–8; Henry Edger and M. John Metcalf, *Lettres d'Auguste Comte à Henry Edger et à M. John Metcalf* (Paris: Apostolat Positiviste, 1889), 13–4; Roger Wunderlich, *Low Living and High Thinking at Modern Times, New York* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), 164–71; Gillis J. Harp, *Positivist Republic* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press), 23–30.

<sup>13</sup> Comte, *System*, IV, 267.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; *System*, I, 123–4. Their spatial scale and social contract promised that the individual could participate in determining "precisely what it is that the common good requires" via historical, geographical and social investigation. The body politic would play a pivotal role in the republic, providing "facts" to establish a "recognized Code of principles, an adequate Education, and a healthy direction of Public Opinion."

<sup>15</sup> Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *Our Social Inheritance* (London: Williams & Norgate), 35–7.

<sup>16</sup> On the republican tradition see J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); *Machiavellian Moment; Three British Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). On the republican tradition and Positivism see Mark Bevir, *The Making of British Socialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 3–9; Royden Harrison, *Before the Socialists* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), 3–4, 210–339; Porter; Jose Harris, "French Revolution to Fin De Siècle Political Thought in Retrospect and Prospect, 1800–1914," in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 896.

<sup>17</sup> Claeys, *Imperial Sceptics*, 3, 102–17, 273–84.

<sup>18</sup> OUBL-CP, MS.Eng. misc.c.349, ff. 52–3. Also see John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1873), 60–1, 163–6; *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* (New York: Holt, 1887), 3–5; *A System of Logic*, 2 vols. Vol. I (London: Parker, 1843), 611; G.H. Lewes, *The Biographical History of Philosophy*, 4 vols. Vol. III (London: W. Clowes and Sons, 1851), 256. Congreve first encountered Positivism during the 1840s while under the influence of such Oxford cohorts as the poet Arthur Clough and the future MP John Blackett. Together they explored Mill's *System of Logic*, which cited Comte's Cours and the establishment of a "sociological system" to "accelerate ... natural progress." Lewes' *Biographical History of Philosophy*, also in their purview, discussed how an "élite of humanity" would soon emerge to develop and apply Comte's sociology teachings.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Congreve, *Essays*, 3 vols. Vol. III (London: Longmans, 1874), 529–769.

<sup>20</sup> Saint-Simon, *Oeuvres*, I, 176–7; Francis Harry Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 102–4.

<sup>21</sup> Congreve, *Essays*, III, 651.

<sup>22</sup> Auguste Comte, *Catechism of Positive Religion* (London: Chapman, 1858), 337, 57; Congreve, *Essays*, III, 529–769.

<sup>23</sup> Congreve, *The Politics of Aristotle with English Notes* (London: Parker, 1855) x–xviii; *Essays*, III, 701–4.

<sup>24</sup> Congreve, *Essays*, II, 356; *Essays*, III, 488–9; *The Politics*, x–xviii; Harriet Martineau, "The Religion of Positivism," *Westminster Review* 69, no. 136 (1858): 305–50.

<sup>25</sup> Richard Congreve, *Essays*, I, 107, 201–8; *Essays*, III, 107–18.

<sup>26</sup> The suggestion to establish a "guardianship of nations" to break up empires peacefully became a Positivist trope. "The War between Prussia and France," *Bee-Hive*, 7 Jan. 1871; "Telegraphic Intelligence," *Daily News*, 7 Jan. 1871; OUBL-CP, MS.Eng. Misc.a.10, f. 32; *Essays*, I, 74–80; "Anti-Aggression League," *Daily News*, 23 Feb. 1882; N.A., "An Anti-Aggression League," *Saturday Review*, 25 Feb 1882; Congreve, *Essays*, II, 453; "Annexation of Burmah," *Daily News*, 12 Jan. 1886.

<sup>27</sup> Congreve, *Two Addresses* (London: Trübner, 1870); BL-PP, Add.MSS, 45,243 ff. 3–9.

<sup>28</sup> Auguste Comte, *Passages from the Letters of Auguste Comte* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1901) 163.

<sup>29</sup> Frederic Harrison, *National Social Problems* (London: Macmillan, 1908) 262.

<sup>30</sup> Comte, *System*, I, 134.

<sup>31</sup> Frederic Harrison, *The Meaning of History* (London: Macmillan, 1894), ii–iii, 54–8, 236.

<sup>32</sup> "Builders' Combination in London and Paris," *National Review*, Oct. 1860; NAPSS, *Transactions, 1860* (London: Parker, 1860), 54.

<sup>33</sup> "The Builders' Strike," *Times*, 15 July 1861; "Response," *Times*, 22 July 1861; BLPES-HP 1/8, ff. 17–20; NAPSS, *Transactions, 1861*, 717–21, 95–6; Frederic Harrison, "Lancashire," *Westminster Review* 24, no. 1 (1863): 191–219; *Autobiographic Memoirs*, I, 323.

<sup>34</sup> E.S. Beesly, *The Sheffield Outrages* (London: Truelove, 1867); "The Trades' Union Commission," *Fortnightly Review* 2, no. 7 (1867): 1–18; Richard Congreve, *Mr. Broadhead and the Anonymous Press* (London: Truelove, 1867).

<sup>35</sup> Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, I, 323.

<sup>36</sup> George Howell, *Labour Legislation, Labour Movements and Labour Leaders* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1902), 128.





- <sup>37</sup> Frederic Harrison, "The Trades-Union Bill," *Fortnightly Review* 6, no. 31 (1869): 30–45; LMU-LTC, 2/2, f. 174; "Commission," *Times*, 14 March 1874; "Labour Laws Commission," *Bradford Observer*, 20 Mar. 1874; BIL-GHP 1/11, f. 20.
- <sup>38</sup> BLPES-HP 2/2, ff. 16–7; Frederic Harrison, *Order & Progress* (London: Longmans, Green, 1875), 152–237.
- <sup>39</sup> George Potter, "The First Point of the New Charter," *Contemporary Review* (1871). George Potter, who outlined the first component of the new movement, urged workers to seek out "improved dwellings for the people" to "rescue" working-class families.
- <sup>40</sup> Harrison, *Autobiographic Memoirs*, I, 251; "Our Social Programme," *Positivist Review* (1894).
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>42</sup> Frederic Harrison, "Ideal London," *Contemporary Review* 18, no. 1 (1898): 547–58; Comte, *System*, IV, 380; Frederic Harrison, *Memories and Thoughts* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 284; *The Meaning of History*, 247–51, 414–31.
- <sup>43</sup> London County Council, *Opening of Kingsway and Aldwych* (London: Southwood, Smith, 1905), 3–5. This project recast the "black and blue" areas of the St Giles district by creating the Haussmann-esque boulevard offering improved communications, attractions and housing between Holborn and The Strand. Harrison resigned from the council, claiming the corruption of architects and developers who demanded to maximise profit potentials instead of creating a civic plaza front St. Mary le Strand.
- <sup>44</sup> Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), 78–9. Matthew Wilson, "Labour, Utopia and Modern Design Theory: the Positivist Sociology of Frederic Harrison," *Intellectual History Review* (2017), 1–23.
- <sup>45</sup> Booth, *Charles Booth*, 8–9, 95–8.
- <sup>46</sup> Mary Booth, *Charles Booth, a Memoir* (London: Macmillan, 1918), 8–9.
- <sup>47</sup> SHL-BP, MS.797/II/26/15, ff. vii, ix; SHL-BP, MS.797/II/24/6, ff. 7, 15–19.
- <sup>48</sup> SHL-BP, MS.797/II/26/15 ff. xi–xiv.
- <sup>49</sup> Charles Booth, "Occupations of the People of the United Kingdom, 1801–81," *Journal of the Statistical Society of London* 49 (1886), 314–444; *Labour and Life of the People*, 2 vols. Vol. II (London: Williams and Norgate, 1891), 262–96; *Pauperism* (London: Macmillan, 1892), 166–7, 200.
- <sup>50</sup> Booth, *Life and Labour of the People in London*, 17 vols. Vol. IX (London: Macmillan, 1904), 234–80, 309.
- <sup>51</sup> *Labour and Life of the People*, I, 163–70.
- <sup>52</sup> "The Strike in the East End," *Northern Echo*, 26 Aug. 1889, 169; Booth, *Labour*, I, 169; Frederic Harrison, "The New Trades-Unionism," *Nineteenth Century* 26, Nov. (1889): 721–32; Congreve, *Essays*, II, 594.
- <sup>53</sup> Booth, *Pauperism*, 166–7, 200; Comte, *System*, I, 130; Charles Booth, *Old Age Pensions and the Aged Poor* (London: Macmillan, 1899), 36–42, 67–8.
- <sup>54</sup> Booth, *Improved Means of Locomotion as a First Step Towards the Cure of the Housing Difficulties of London* (London: Macmillan, 1901) 1–23; "Mr. Balfour and The Housing Problem," *Times*, 15 Feb. 1901.
- <sup>55</sup> Congreve, *Essays*, II, 225; Thomas Henry Huxley, *Lay Sermons* (London: Macmillan, 1870), 88, 153–91; Susan Liveing and Patrick Geddes, *A Nineteenth-Century Teacher* (London: Paul, 1926), 11; BLPES-LPS 1/1, ff. 1–4; Pickering, *Auguste Comte*, III, 571; S.H. Swinny, "Two Faithful Lives," *Positivist Review* (1919); Patrick Geddes, "A Current Criticism of the Positivist School," *Positivist Review* (1921).
- <sup>56</sup> Patrick Geddes, *The Classification of Statistics* (Edinburgh: Black, 1881), 12, 23–9; US.T-GED 9/18, f. 176.
- <sup>57</sup> Patrick Geddes, *John Ruskin* (Edinburgh: William Brown, 1884), 14, 26–7.
- <sup>58</sup> Victor Branford, "The Edinburgh Summer Meeting," *Positivist Review* (1893).
- <sup>59</sup> Branford and Geddes, *Our Social Inheritance*, 35.
- <sup>60</sup> Patrick Geddes, "The Influence of Geographical Conditions on Social Development," *Geographical Journal* 12, no. 6 (1898): 580–6; *Education for Economics*.
- <sup>61</sup> Patrick Geddes, "Cyprus, Actual and Possible," *Contemporary Review* 71 (1897): 892–908.
- <sup>62</sup> Patrick Geddes, *City Development* (Edinburgh: Geddes, 1904), 1–3, 21–35, 166, 221; NLS, MS.10612 ff. 2, 18, 22, 25; Comte, *System*, IV, 274–5.
- <sup>63</sup> Geddes, *City Development*, 1–3, 21–35, 166, 221.
- <sup>64</sup> RIBA, *Transactions* (London: RIBA), 66–71.
- <sup>65</sup> Patrick Geddes, *Cities in Evolution* (Williams & Norgate, 1915), 96, 207–10, 52.
- <sup>66</sup> Geddes, *The Civic Survey of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Outlook Tower, 1911), 537–57.
- <sup>67</sup> Sociological Society, *Sociological Papers*, 3 vols. Vol. II (London: Macmillan, 1906), 92–3; Patrick Geddes, "Two Steps in Civics," *Town Planning Review* 4, no. 2 (1913): 78–94.
- <sup>68</sup> Victor Branford, *Interpretations & Forecasts* (New York: Kennerley, 1914), 373.
- <sup>69</sup> The three-volume *Sociological Papers* is graced by the commentary of celebrity intellectuals such as Ebenezer Howard, Émile Durkheim, L.T. Hobhouse, Bertrand Russell, William Beveridge and H.G. Wells.
- <sup>70</sup> A.H. Halsey, *A History of Sociology in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 9–11, 248.
- <sup>71</sup> Sociological Society, *Sociological Papers*, I, 142; Lewis Mumford, *Values for Survival* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1946), 153.
- <sup>72</sup> Victor V. Branford, "A Craft University," *Athenaeum* 1, no. 4626 (1918): 79–82.
- <sup>73</sup> NLS, MS.10556 f. 17.
- <sup>74</sup> Victor Branford, "Survivals and Tendencies in the University," *Sociological Review* a7, no. 1 (1914): 1–8; Victor V. Branford, *An Undeveloped Estate of the Empire*, 3–14.
- <sup>75</sup> "A Sociological Approach Towards Unity," in *Ideals of Science and Faith*, ed. James Edward Hand. (London: Allen 1904), 104–56; Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Modern Library, 1934); Victor Branford, "The Founders of Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 10, no. 1 (1904): 94–126.
- <sup>76</sup> "The Mobilisation of National Credit," *Sociological Review* 7, no. 4 (1914), 307–14; Sociological Society Cities Committee, *Papers for the Present*, 2 (London: Headley Bros., 1917–9), 1–33. The Bank of England would consolidate disparate cooperative initiatives, notably the Co-partnership Tenants Limited, Agricultural Organisation Society and Urban Banks Association. Shopkeepers, artisans and craftspeople could receive loan disbursements, which were previously available only to industrial chiefs. Here Branford claimed that the unification of the nation's financial system mirrored Comte's vision: "The concentration of selective control, which we are to-day witnessing in the Governor's Court of the Bank of England," he wrote, "is suggestive of the 'triumvirate of bankers,' which Comte foresaw at the apex of the temporal power in the modern state." Idealist financiers, he imagined, could act as civic functionaries – a "hieratic craft" of "social selection" – "directing and controlling communitary life and welfare."
- <sup>77</sup> Frederick J. Gould, *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (London: Watts & Co., 1916), 9; Victor Branford, *Whitherward? Hell or Eutopia* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1921), 1–59; Sociological Society Cities Committee, *Papers for the Present*, 9 (London: Headley Bros., 1917–9), 42.
- <sup>78</sup> Branford, *Interpretations & Forecasts*, 301–56.
- <sup>79</sup> Sociological Society Cities Committee, *Papers*, 2, 1–17.



<sup>80</sup> Sybella Branford, "An Industrial Symposium," *New Age*, 7 Dec. 1916; W. Anderson, "Regionalism and an Educational Guild," *New Age*, 12 Oct; Victor V. Branford, "Ora Labora," *Times* (1920).

<sup>81</sup> Victor Branford and Patrick Geddes, *The Coming Polity* (Williams and Norgate, 1917), 52.

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BL-PP, British Library, Positivist Papers.  
BLPES-HP, British Library of Political & Economic Science, Frederic Harrison Papers.  
BLPES-LPS, British Library of Political & Economic Science, London Positivist Society Papers.  
HALS-EH, Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies, Ebenezer Howard Papers.  
KU-LP, Keele University, Le Play House Papers.  
LMU-LTC, London Metropolitan University, London Trades Council.  
MAC, Maison d'Auguste Comte.  
OUBL-CP, Oxford University Bodleian Library, Richard Congreve Papers.  
SHL-BP, Senate House Library, Charles Booth Papers.  
US.T-GED, University of Strathclyde, Patrick Geddes Papers.

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