

## Grey Literature and Urban Planning: History and Accessibility

Rose M. Jackson, Portland State University

Unfortunately, Library of Congress catalog card numbers are rarely assigned to documents issued by municipal, state, and federal governments in time for inclusion in their first (and usually last) printing. In part, this is because governmental publications are considered most appropriately in the public domain, with no restrictions on quotation or reproduction; therefore, Library of Congress catalog card numbers are not assigned in advance as they frequently are for commercial publishers when copyright is requested. State and municipal governments tend to discount the vital function of libraries as depositories and central references for documentation of lasting value. Since many important documents relating to comprehensive urban planning are issued today—and will be issued increasingly in the future—by regional, state, and local governments, Library of Congress catalog card numbers or Standard Book Numbers should be available for inclusion in the initial printing. Otherwise, any electronic reference and data-processing system for city planning which utilizes general reference or standard numbers as descriptors may be seriously incomplete until the assignment of these numbers to documents is received...perhaps long after publication.<sup>1</sup>

Melville C. Branch

### Abstract

In 1970, Branch had his finger on the pulse of urban planning and its grey literature implications for urban planners. The majority of urban planning primary material, is published within the public domain with an intentionally limited distribution; therefore it rarely receives standard "cataloging" tags from the originating agency, and as a discipline, planners discount the function of a central reference point (or library) for the collection of documents. By most generally accepted definitions the data, documents and reports produced by urban planners are "born" grey. This paper examines these factors and their implications for researchers and librarians within the arena of Urban History and Planning and based upon the preliminary results of a survey offers some possible areas for collaboration.

### Introduction

As a new librarian responsible for collection development within the field of Urban Studies, I first sought insight toward developing a collection philosophy by examining Urban/City Planning guides and bibliographies. Within our collection, in addition to the Branch text, I found two other guides of note: City Planning: A Basic Bibliography of Sources and Trends by George Bestor<sup>2</sup> and "The History of Urban Planning in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography" by Martin Gellen.<sup>3</sup> Although these bibliographies have historical value, they lack consistency and do not adequately reflect the composition and forms of material currently being produced with the field. After contacting several librarians at universities granting a degree in Urban Studies/Planning or Architecture, I sought contact and information with the "governing" library association: the Council of Planning Librarians (CPL). Unfortunately, the CPL, an organization devoted to the collection, preservation, and exchange of planning material, disbanded in 1999. The CPL, historically, produced a directory of planning libraries. This directory facilitated the exchange of professional information and planning reports among libraries. However, the last directory was published in 1990.<sup>4</sup> Therefore what was "born" grey but had some shades of "white" with respect to accessibility has moved further toward "black" among researchers and libraries. At a time when many institutions are offering a course in Urban History, the primary material supporting this field, the planning reports, documents, pamphlets, and drawings, are being lost.

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<sup>1</sup> Branch, Melville C. Comprehensive Urban Planning: A Selective Annotated Bibliography with Related Materials. Beverly Hills: Sage, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> Bestor, George C., and Holway R. Jones. City Planning: A Basic Bibliography of Sources and Trends. North Sacramento: The Central Printing Company, 1962.

<sup>3</sup> Gellen, Martin. "The History of Urban Planning in the United States: An Annotated Bibliography." CPL Bibliographies 107(March 1983).

<sup>4</sup> Council of Planning Librarians. Directory of Planning and Urban Affairs Libraries in the United States and Canada. 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. Ed. Patricia Coatsworth. Chicago: ALA, 1990.