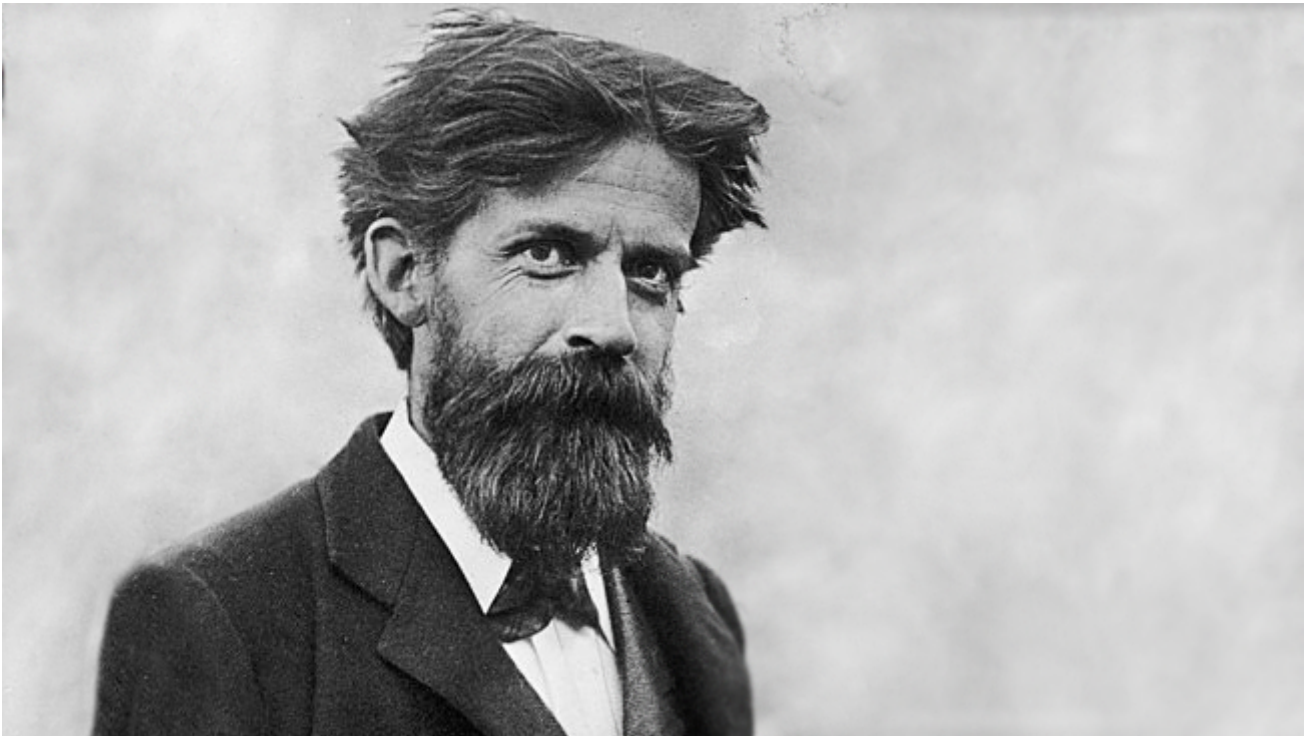


Patrick Geddes says...



Greetings! Patrick Geddes at your service. I'm delighted to engage in a discussion about town planning, civic life, and the interconnectedness of nature and human society. As a biologist turned sociologist and town planner, I've always believed that to truly understand a city, one must view it as a living organism - complex, dynamic, and deeply rooted in its environment.

My approach to urban planning goes far beyond mere "place-planning" or "work-planning". It's about "folk-planning" - understanding the people, their needs, their culture, and how they interact with their surroundings. I've always said, "A city is more than a place in space, it is a drama in time."

I'm a firm believer in the power of observation and diagnosis before treatment. That's why I advocate for comprehensive civic surveys before any planning begins. We must understand the geology, geography, climate, economic life, and social institutions of a city and its region. Only then can we hope to create meaningful improvements.

In my work, I've emphasised the importance of preserving historical buildings, promoting local culture, and integrating nature into urban spaces. I've always said, "By leaves we live" - a reminder of the crucial role that green spaces play in urban life.

I'm particularly passionate about education and civic engagement. My Outlook Tower in Edinburgh was designed as a "sociological laboratory" to help people understand their city and its place in the wider world. I believe that by engaging citizens in the process of understanding and improving their environment, we can create more vibrant, sustainable communities.

Your enthusiasm for investigating your local neighbourhood warms my heart. This is precisely the kind of civic engagement and hands-on learning that I have long championed. Your approach

aligns beautifully with what I call the "survey-analysis-plan" method.

Let me offer some guidance based on my experiences:

1. **Observation is key:** As you walk, engage all your senses. Note not just what you see, but what you hear, smell, and feel. The texture of a place is as important as its visual appearance.
2. **Use a "thinking machine":** I've found great value in creating visual diagrams to connect ideas. As you walk, sketch quick maps or diagrams to capture the relationships between different elements of the environment.
3. **Consider the "Valley Section":** Look at how the natural geography influences human settlement patterns. Are there hills, valleys, or water bodies shaping the layout?
4. **"Place-Work-Folk":** This is a key triad in my thinking. Observe how the physical environment (Place) relates to the economic activities (Work) and the social life (Folk) of the area.
5. **Historical context:** Try to discern the layers of history in the built environment. What structures are old? What's new? How has the area evolved?
6. **Green spaces:** Pay particular attention to parks, gardens, and any wild areas. Remember, "By leaves we live"!
7. **Social spaces:** Note where people gather, interact, and build community.
8. **Civic institutions:** Identify schools, libraries, community centres, and other places that contribute to civic life.

As you compile your analysis, try to see the interconnections between these elements. Remember, a city is not merely a collection of separate parts, but a living organism with complex interrelationships.

Now, regarding my concept of "conservative surgery" - this is an approach I developed in response to the widespread demolition and reconstruction that was common in urban planning of my time. The idea is to make minimal interventions that preserve the existing urban fabric while improving living conditions.

Conservative surgery involves:

1. Careful study of the existing conditions
2. Identifying areas that need improvement
3. Making small, strategic interventions rather than wholesale demolition
4. Preserving historical and cultural elements
5. Working with the natural landscape rather than against it
6. Involving local communities in the planning process

The goal is to enhance the health, functionality, and beauty of a place while respecting its existing character and the needs of its inhabitants. It's about evolution, not revolution - gradual, thoughtful improvement rather than drastic change.

As you conduct your survey, consider how conservative surgery principles might apply to your neighbourhood. Where could small interventions make a significant difference? How might the existing strengths of the area be built upon?

Consider categorising your observations under these example headings:

Site Analysis Topics - Folk, Work, Place

Folk (Spiritual and Social Dimension)

- This represents the people, their communities, and their cultural practices.
- It includes the spiritual and social aspects of a society, such as beliefs, traditions, and social interactions.
- Cultural infrastructure supporting this could include places of worship, community centres, and spaces for cultural events and gatherings.

Potential topics to study/map:

- **Social Interactions:** Evidence of meeting places, events, cultural gatherings
- **Pedestrian Behaviour:** Traffic patterns, desire lines, informal paths
- **Cultural Significance:** Site history, local traditions, community values
- **Accessibility:** Universal design, inclusive spaces
- **Safety and Security:** CCTV, lighting, natural surveillance
- **Public Art:** Formal installations, informal graffiti, community murals
- **Cultural Events:** Festivals, markets, performances
- **Sensory Experience:** Noise levels, smells, visual aesthetics
- **Digital Connectivity:** WiFi hotspots, cellular coverage
- **Community Facilities:** Libraries, community centres, places of worship
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Exercise areas, meditation spaces, health services

Work (Historical and Economic Dimension):

- This encompasses the economic activities and livelihoods of the people.
- It includes historical patterns of work and industry that have shaped the culture over time.
- Cultural infrastructure here might include creative workspaces, studios, traditional craft workshops, and industrial heritage sites

Potential topics to study/map:

- **Local Economy:** Shops, vendors, markets, business districts
- **Transport Nodes:** Bus stops, train stations, bike-sharing stations
- **Workspaces:** Offices, co-working spaces, industrial areas
- **Educational Institutions:** Schools, universities, training centres
- **Healthcare Facilities:** Hospitals, clinics, pharmacies
- **Civic Services:** Government offices, post offices, emergency services
- **Maintenance and Management:** Cleaning schedules, waste management
- **Land Use and Zoning:** Residential, commercial, industrial areas

- **Infrastructure:** Power lines, telecommunications, water supply
- **Agriculture and Food Production:** Urban farms, community gardens
- **Innovation Hubs:** Research centres, tech incubators, makerspaces

Place (Geographical and Environmental Dimension):

- This refers to the physical environment, both natural and built.
- It includes the geography, climate, and ecological features that influence culture.
- Cultural infrastructure in this context could include heritage buildings, public spaces, parks, and structures that reflect the local environment

Potential topics to study/map:

- **Natural Environment:** Trees, plants, water bodies, soil types, ecology
- **Built Environment:** Building heights, architectural styles, materials
- **Topography:** Level changes, slopes, viewpoints
- **Climate:** Sunlight patterns, wind direction, microclimates
- **Public Spaces:** Parks, squares, playgrounds, recreational areas
- **Movement Networks:** Roads, cycle routes, pedestrian paths, accessibility ramps
- **Urban Furniture:** Benches, shelters, public toilets, drinking fountains
- **Boundaries:** Legal, political, and perceived boundaries
- **Environmental Factors:** Air quality, noise pollution, flooding risks
- **Heritage:** Historical buildings, archaeological sites, conservation areas
- **Geology and Hydrology:** Soil composition, groundwater, drainage systems
- **Urban Ecology:** Biodiversity, green corridors, habitat connectivity
- **Sensory Landscape:** Visual, auditory, and olfactory characteristics

Remember, the goal is not just to describe, but to understand. How do all these elements interact? What is the "life" of this place?

You will require:

- Base maps of the site
- Transparent overlays for layering different types of information
- Notebooks for sketches, observations, and narrative vignettes
- A matrix template for identifying relationships between elements

To help with your analysis you should:

- Map visible and invisible systems
- Consider multiple parameters and their interrelationships
- Identify 'centres' of importance or intensity
- Write short character sketches or vignettes
- Look for patterns that emerge when comparing the topics listed under folk, work and place

This survey is not just an academic exercise, my friend. It's the first step towards active citizenship and thoughtful urban planning. By truly understanding your neighbourhood, you'll be better equipped to envision and work towards its improvement.

Now, off you go! Observe, record, and most importantly, engage with your environment. And remember, "By living we learn"!

Kind regards,

Patrick Geddes

The Outlook Tower