• Paper / Proposal Title:


• Author(s) Name:

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• University or Company Affiliation:

Ball State University

• Presentation Method. I would like to:

i. present in person (with a written paper)

• Abstract (300 words):

By the early twentieth century, Britain had forged a congeries of colonial outposts comprised of some 57 million people within a territory of 95 million square kilometres. Historians of political thought have suggested that there were few if any critics of the British Empire until the end of the nineteenth century. Yet it has been recently shown that a little-known group of citizen-sociologists represented a cogent, polemical force against British aggression abroad. Along these lines this essay seeks to show that these citizen-sociologists in fact sought to systematically break up the British Empire and, in turn, create a network of idyllic real places – deliberative eutopias – which were to take the form of Garden City-states. These citizen-sociologists were the followers of the French philosopher Auguste Comte. The former secretary of the ‘utopian socialist’ Henri de Saint-Simon, Comte was once considered the most well-known thinker of the
nineteenth century. He introduced the modern science of sociology and the republican Religion of Humanity in association with a vision he called the ‘Republic of the West’. After setting out the socio-spatial character and qualities of the sovereign republics nested within the ‘Republic of the West’, this essay will show that from the 1850s Comte’s British followers, led by the Oxford don and ex-Anglican minister Richard Congreve, implemented a controversial practice of applied sociology and the Religion of Humanity with the aim to create his global network of utopian city-states or republics. Using an intellectual history method, this essay will show that through to the interwar period Congreve’s affiliates – Frederic Harrison, Charles Booth, Patrick Geddes and Victor Branford – attempted to realise Comte’s vision. With scarcely used source material it will present the Positivists as an organised resistance to imperialism, industrial exploitation, poverty and despondency. Effectively this essay contributes to our understanding of how Positivism can be understood as a utopian spatial design praxis.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Matthew Wilson is an Assistant Professor of Architecture at Ball State University. He earned a Master of Arts with distinction from the Architectural Association and a PhD in History from Royal Holloway, University of London. As an intellectual historian Wilson’s research focuses on the political, philosophical and epistemological movements of spatial design.