

Garden City Movement: Development and Challenges

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Abstract:

Garden City is an urban planning concept that adopted from of Ebenezer Howard who developed the idea of garden cities as a way towards a better and brighter civilization. The Garden City concepts such as decentralization, low density, self-containment communities, new settlements and proportion of population to land are not anymore fit with current situation which is urban population growth rapidly imbalance with land availability. The Garden City Model introduced the application of some basic planning principles which are still in use today. It consists of self-sufficient communities surrounded by greenbelts with planned proportionate areas in agriculture, housing, commerce and industry. This paper discusses the creation and development of the theoretical and planning principles of the Garden City Model and its success in solving economic and social problems of densely populated city. It also discusses the modification of these principles and their applications in modern planning theories. This paper discusses the development of garden city movement in today scenario and also the challenges that we have to face with it.

Keywords: Garden City Concept, Ebenezer Howard, Urban planning.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Garden City concept in urban planning takes its name from the work of Ebenezer Howard, who in his book *To-Morrow: A peaceful path to realm reform* (1898) developed the idea of garden cities as a way towards 'a better and brighter civilization' (Freestone 1989b). Howard's argument begins with a protest against urban overcrowding and the conditions which existed in industrial countries mainly in Europe in the 19th century (Howard 1996a). In terms of a definition, Garden City was defined by Purdon (1925) as 'a town designed for healthy living and industry; of a size that makes possible a full measure of social life, but not only larger; surrounded by a rural belt; the whole of the land being in public ownership or held in trust for the community'. This article seeks to explain and discuss the Garden City concept as associated to planning evolution and describes the later changes in approach to planning better cities in current circumstances by considering arguments from some experts and evidence derived from practice.

II. HOWARD'S CONCEPT OF GARDEN CITY

The Garden City Movement was invented by Sir Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928) (Couch, 2014). It was first described in his book *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, published in 1902 (Ebenezer Howard, 2014). The Garden City Model introduced the application of some basic planning principles which are still in use today. It consists of self-sufficient communities surrounded by greenbelts with planned proportionate areas in agriculture, housing, commerce and industry (Autopodia, 2014). This Review paper discusses the creation and development of the theoretical and planning principles of the Garden City Model and its success in solving economic and social problems of densely populated cities. It also discusses the modification of these principles and their applications in modern planning theories.

The search for an ideal city was due to the intense industrialization and resulting urbanization of major different cities about the late 19th century. There were many social, economic and commercial activities in large cities, thereby causing high levels of migration from less developed regions in these cities. This excessive immigration resulted in issues like; overpopulation, housing shortage, high rents, air pollution, urban slums and lack of sunlight and open spaces (Howard, 1902). According to (Fishman, 1982), Howard perceived the economy to be corrupt, inhumane, inefficient and unhealthy.

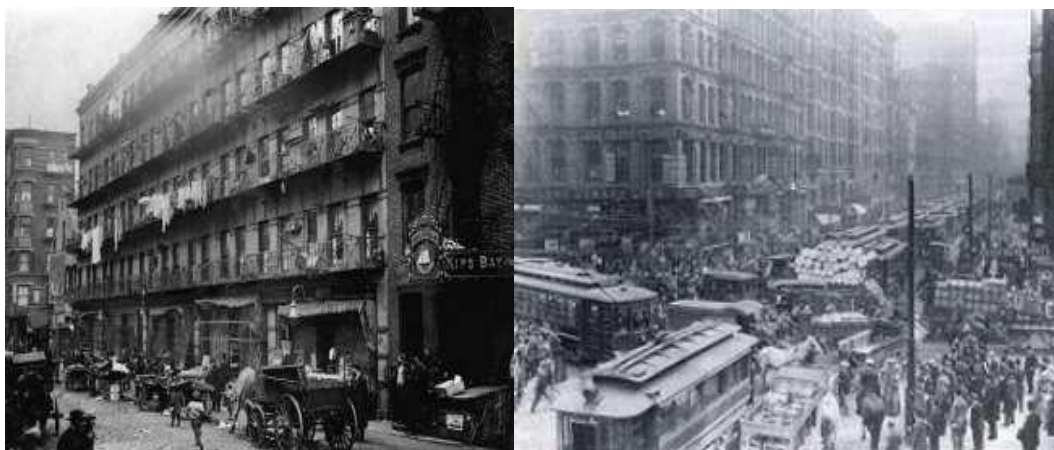
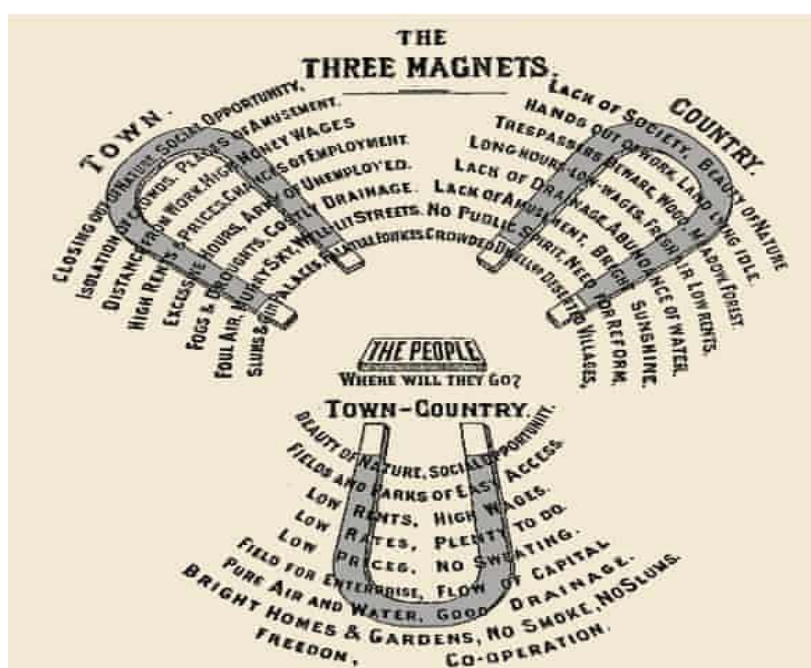


Fig. 1 Hine (1912) Fig. 2 Industrial Cities
(Source: 19th century industrialization city)

Analysing the issues developed by the rapid urbanization, Howard noticed a contrasting phenomenon in the countryside. The countryside suffered from; depopulation, lack of amusement, lack of society, capital and labour.

The town had all that the country was lacking and vice-versa. Howard then sorts to combine the best aspects of the town and the country in formation of the garden city (Ebenezer Howard, 2014).



The Three Magnets
(Source: Howard Ebenezer, Wikipedia)

Redefining the town and countryside as magnets, the people as needles, and man's socio-economic desires as attraction, Howard realized the theory of The Three Magnets, introducing the third alternative; the Town-Country Magnet (Howard, 1902). The Town-Country offers; high wages, social opportunities, and places of amusements, healthy living conditions, low rents, and large parks (Howard, 1902). Howard believed that the Town-Country would enhance the enjoyment of human society and the beauty of nature simultaneously (Fishman, 1982).

In order to achieve the socio-economic aspects of the Town-Country, the ideal city would run by communal land ownership, whereby, the rent would be the main source of revenue, employed by municipality (governing body) in the creation and maintenance of public amenities, old age pensions, and accident insurance (Howard, 1902). The Garden City was to be built from scratch on agricultural land, which had low ecological

value, thereby increasing the value of the land, so that it could generate significant revenue through rent for municipality (Howard, 1902).

III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF GARDEN CITIES WORLDWIDE

The application of variations of the Howard concept of a garden city, especially until the 1960s, was the most intensive in many European countries during the restoration of the cities, especially after the First and Second World War (Markova, 2007). The first experimental cities were Letchworth (started 1903) and Belwin (1919) near London, whose planners were Raymond Unvain and Bari Parker.

Howards Garden city model was directly experimented on two towns; Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City. Letchworth was the first Garden City ever built (Ebenezer Howard, 2014). It lies on a train line, 35 miles from London, located in Hertfordshire, England, and it covers an area of 5,500 acres, which used to serve as agricultural land with little or no value (Ebenezer Howard, 2014). Although Letchworth was not designed in a regular concentric pattern, it follows the zoning principles of the Garden City Model. In other to build Letchworth, Howard needed funding, but he did not get any financial support from the government. I suppose it was because the development of his ideal city had no positive effect on the pre-existing cities, which have been invested heavily upon. The idea of destroying or ignoring pre-existing cities to rebuilt perfect ones was also the basis of many other revolutionists in solving the industrial crisis. This approach displays the lack of consideration of the financial requirements in the realization of ideal cities. According to Autopodia (2014), Howard got financial support only from private investors who were concerned with their personal profits, rather than the communal growth of Letchworth City. As a result, Howard forwent the idea of communal land ownership with no landlords (Autopodia, 2014).



Letchworth Garden City
(Source: Aerial photo of Letchworth garden city)

Letchworth was environmentally successful, with lots of open spaces and public parks healthy living conditions and beautiful tree-lined streets, most of which remain today (Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, 2014). The city attracted firms because of the cheap rent and surplus space, resulting from its earlier use as agricultural land. It also attracted residents, as the living conditions were favourable. Due to the fact that the implementation of communal land ownership was ignored, the rents were not cheap, they could only be afforded by skilled white-collar workers (Autopodia, 2014). Letchworth failed partially as an independent community because of the improved transportation system which made it easier to connect to London.



Welwyn Garden City
(Source: Aerial photo of Welwyn garden city)

Welwyn Garden City was the second garden city in England (founded 1920) and one of the first new towns (designated 1948). It is unique in being both a garden city and a new town and exemplifies the physical, social and cultural planning ideals of the periods in which it was built. Welwyn, the second Garden City, 20 miles from London, performed just as well as Letchworth, but it lacked public, commercial and industrial buildings, which caused it to depend heavily on London for socio-economic activities.

IV. PLANNING POLICY CHALLENGES THE GARDEN CITY MODEL

The policy and planning challenges to achieving that ambition, however, are markedly different now than when the original Garden Settlements were being planned 100 years ago.

The supporting literature relating to the latest wave of Garden Settlements is peppered with ambitious phrases such as ‘a Garden Village/Town/City of national significance’, ‘flagship development’, ‘exemplar scheme’, and ‘opportunity to deliver lower-density executive style homes.’ There is also great emphasis on extensive networks of connected green infrastructure and generous provision of open space. We commend and support all of those aspirations—but wonder if they will be enough to get these projects across the line.

Today, there are myriad planning and policy challenges to overcome—many of which simply did not exist in the pre-1947 era—as well as numerous competing demands on available funds. Many of these are interconnected issues that need to be contended with in tandem, such as:

- **Land ownership** – we know of a Garden Village that has some 70 or 80 different individual landowners, despite being at the lower end of the size spectrum for Garden Settlements at around 1,600 dwellings. That creates a whole range of challenges in terms of logistics surrounding engagement, creating a commonly shared vision, expectations regarding land value, and so on.
- **Design standards** – these should be set high, but the ‘Garden’ badge can’t be a licence for requirements that are unduly onerous or so prescriptive that they undermine viability and deliverability. Resolving this balance is a challenge in any case—and more so for the Garden Settlement where expectations are elevated.
- **Density** – residing in a low-density community within a green and pleasant land is the utopia that most people would aspire to, given the choice. The present-day reality, however, is that land resources are much scarcer and more valuable than when Howard was around.
- **Achievable sales revenues** – some parts of the country command much higher sales revenues than others, where there are effectively value ceilings. In some parts of the North of England, for instance, it can be difficult to achieve £200 per sq. Ft whereas receipts in excess of double that level can be commanded elsewhere. When the full complement of affordable housing is factored in, along with the need for significant supporting infrastructure (schools, medical facilities, roads, drainage systems and the like)—as well as a plethora of other requirements from various agencies—this can seriously jeopardise scheme viability where achievable sales revenues are relatively low. The question then is whether the ‘Garden’ aspiration is just one more requirement that takes its place alongside the rest.

- **Funding the supporting infrastructure** – even the smallest Garden Settlements are sizeable, at approximately 1,500 dwellings upwards, and funding the required infrastructure may be inherently challenging and complex. One (or maybe a handful) of developers will inevitably have to go first; others who follow may therefore achieve higher sales revenues when the Garden Settlement has taken more shape. The concept of the ‘Pacemaker Premium’—where higher values occur for later phases of development when the location has its own status and gravitas—is already appearing in viability work we are involved in. Which parties should fund what infrastructure, and when, may require imagination and courage? Developers of early phases may need to provide ‘over-sized’ infrastructure. Some form of ‘roof tax’ and an equalisation mechanism may be required. So, coverage and clawback will need to be factored in.
- **Environmental Impact Assessment** – the scale of the Garden Settlements means they will invariably be EIA developments. Whilst not impossible, undertaking a single EIA for the whole village, town or city would be extremely challenging and so developers will need to consider voluntarily submitting an Environmental Statement for their phase of development.

V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Garden City Model inspired the New Towns Act. It has had a major effect on town planning, which has a direct effect on human behaviour.

Howard benefitted from a world where he could pursue his ideas relatively unencumbered by the bureaucracy of things like planning permission. Hence, the concepts of the early Garden City movement in terms of physical planning, development process, governance and management were driven by thoughts that were mainly idealistic.

The ‘Garden Settlement’ term probably needs to have a different practicable application now. A balance needs to be struck between quality and deliverability, within a planning context that is infinitely more demanding than a century ago.

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