URBAN LANDSCAPE - GARDEN CITY MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with the creation of a new mode of thought concerning urban life that has generally been called in the English language “town planning.” Other important aspects derived from the early Garden Cities and Unwind are the flexible plan, and its heavy reliance on the site. There was present a constant drive to retain the beauty and not to destroy but improve the natural aspects of the site on development.

Key words: Urban Landscape, Garden Cities, City Planning, town planning


1. INTRODUCTION

This study deals with the creation of a new mode of thought concerning urban life that has generally been called in the English language “town planning.” Along with its analogs urbanisms and the phrase town planning was, as francoise choay, coined in the last years of the nineteenth century to “mark with the all impact of neologism the advent of an entirely novel relationship between western man and the organization of his cities—resulting from the industrial revolution.” The main focus of the study will be on the ideas and influence of one of the central figures in the genesis of this new discipline, Ebenezer Howard, and on his proposals for restructuring the urban environment as embodied in the Garden City plan.

In the little more than 75 years since the publication of Howard’s major work, To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform, town planning has moved from being the exclusive preserve of a diverse collection of reformers and visionaries and not a great number for all their diversity, to being an accepted and generally unquestioned function of the modern state. It has become in fact a major instrument and ideology of landscape creation and change in the modern world.

Modern town planning is at once a governmental activity, a profession, and a social movement. As a social movement it emerged, as choay asserts above, as a response to the sudden and unprecedented growth of the industrial city, while the other two aspects, planning as a profession and as a government function, arose subsequently from the efforts of those early reformers such as Howard and his profession it began in Great Britain with the formation of the Town Planning Institute in 1913, and as a governmental activity it received its first statutory recognition in the Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909.

The Garden City Movement originates from the one major writing of Sir Ebenezer Howard, Garden Cities of To-morrow, which had first appeared in 1898 as To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform and was reissued under its present title in 1902. It will perhaps be valuable at the outset to outline some of the difficulties.
2. ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT
There are then three aspects to Howard’s vision:

- The recognition of a problem: the overcrowding, congestion, crime, poverty, and high mortality rate of the nineteenth century industrial city.
- A solution: the dispersal of population from London and the new industrial cities of the north to his garden cities.
- A method for achieving his goals: the nationalization of rural land for the building of such new communities, beginning with a small scale exemplary model on the land required.

The three following sections of this chapter will take up the development of Howard’s thought in terms of these three aspects of his scheme.

3. THE PROBLEM OF GREAT CITIES
Writing in 1988 and looking back over that he considered the central issues of the preceding century, the American sociologist, Adna weber concluded that:

The concentration of population was now recognized as the most remarkable social phenomenon of the present century… The tendency towards concentration and agglomeration is all but universal in the western world.

Over the course of the century a new order of human settlement has been created, it had become an “age of great cities” not only was the overall increase in British population overwhelming, doubling itself in the first 50 year of the century, and again doubling by 1918, but throughout the period towns were absorbing an increasing percentage of the British population was classed as urban.

The rise of great cities, the transformation of Britain from a predominantly urban one in 1900, was a profound social reorganization on which generated controversy from its very beginnings and continues to do so today. It has been argued that British culture throughout this period had an anti-urban bias, but the city has always had boosters and admirers, even if the opponents of the of the cities seemed at times the majority. As Briggs provides perhaps the best assessment of contrasting reactions to the new cities in his Victorian cities where he writes:

To some of them this was a matter of pride—cities were symbols of growth and progress: to others the spread of cities and the increase in their numbers were matters of concern, even alarm.

This “question of great cities”, of course, overlapped with other areas controversy, especially concerning industrialism and poverty, but it appears to have had a separate existence and continuity of its own throughout the century. Howard’s conception of the urban condition of this time thus follows a century of outgoing debate over the question and marks a comparatively late stage, in fact, it will be argued below, a transitional stage from a Victorian to modern view.

Before 1800, the city was usually identified. With excess rather than the poverty and degrading conditions with which it was to later become identified. Cities were considered dangerous in that they had the power to influence for ill the moral values fostered by country life. William cowper, in The Task, acknowledges the cultural dominance of the city:

And genial soil of cultivated life thrive most, and may perhaps thrive only there, But condemns its corrupting influence:

In cities foul example on most minds begets its likeness. Rank abundance on rank abundance breeds in gross and pampered cities slot and lust. And wantonness and glutinous excess. In cities vice is hidden with most ease.
4. THE SOLUTION: THE GARDEN CITY

The twin problems of urban overcrowding and rural depopulation could not be solved, Howard judged, by any alteration or improvement to existing cities but only by”…starting on a bold plan on comparatively virgin soil,” that is , by the construction of an entirely new form of settlement, the garden city. The basis for this new form of city is initially presented through the metaphor of “the three magnets.” (see figure 1) The town and the country are regarded as two sources of attraction, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, and each trying to draw the population to itself.

This third alternative it “Town-country” which, as is indicated in Figure 1, provides all the advantages of both city and country life with none of their attendant drawbacks. The task that Howard sets himself with the garden city proposals is the construction of a completely new magnet, “so that the force of the old attractions shall be overcome by the force of the new attractions that are to be created.” In answer to help question.

![Figure 1 The Three Magnets (Source: Garden Cities of To-morrow)](image)

In this famous diagram Hoeard presents his ideas on the correct principles of urban growth. The town and the country are presented as alternate forces attracting the population. Howard’s scheme calls for the creation of a third alternative, town-country, which possesses the advantages of both and the drawbacks of neither.

“The people, where will they go?” posed in his diagram, the answer must obviously be, to the magnet with the strongest force of attraction town-country. “Town and Country,” wrote Howard, “must be married and out of this joyous union will spring a new hope, a new life, a new civilization.” Human society and nature are meant to be enjoyed together.
Howard has long been identified as the originator of this third alternative solution to the problem of industrial urbanism.

The attempt to reconcile industrial production and a healthier physical environment was, however, in no way new with Howard, but represented a characteristic late Victorian response to the problem of great cities. Members of the most parties believed that some entirely new pattern of urbanization was required. Charles Kingsley, who exerted a strong influence on Howard. Concluded in 1881, “after years of thought,” that the only remedy for:

In order to trace the evolution of this type of solution to problems industrialization and urbanization, it is necessary to distinguish between two different but parallel social movements which were affecting patterns of settlement in the nineteenth century, the construction of model villages and housing estates, and the establishment of new industrial villages.

The village ideal had, as Ruth Glass argues, always been a strong component of English life. Success and the good life were associated for many with as essentially rural life style, as represented by the image of the country house. In the nineteenth century a pattern of development, detached houses set in gardens
and arranged on an informal ground plan, emerged to provide the expanding middle classes with kind of surrogate country estate. Although the exclusive residential suburb began to proliferate in the 80’s and 90’s. The character of these villages was completely residential and based on class selection. They were not intended as alternatives or solutions to the problem of the industrializing cities, but as retreats for middle classes who worked in those cities. A typical example of this kind of development is the suggested garden village at Ilford in Essex put forward in tail’s Edinburg Magazine for December 1848. The scheme stressed air and space, shrubbery and gardens, schools and churches, and self-contained cottages in a group not too large to deprive it of neither country character nor roof small to reduce social intercourse. The numbers involved were to have been in the order of five or six thousand. The scheme was commercial and appealed explicitly to “the professional classes.”

The type of proposals put forward by Howard and others was, on the contrary, aimed specifically at coping with demands of the new industrialization and its effect on all classes. The picturesque villages, such as the one in Alford, or Bedford park in London, rejected industrial production and represented a middle class paradise, essentially a flight from the realities of the expanding cities, while the industrial villages attempted, with whatever degree of success, to meet problem head on.

One of the most widely known visions of a transformed industrial landscape to emerge from this period was William morris’ News from Nowhere, which was like Howard’s work, greatly influenced not only by Ruskin, but by Edward Bellamy’s Looking Backward.

Howard’s Conception of the relationship between the city and the greenbelt sectors in his garden city scheme.

The next inner ring is to be called “Grand Avenue.” This avenue is fully entitled to the name it bears, for it is to be 420 feet wide. Howard notes with pride that, “Portland Place, London, is only 100 feet wide. The center of the Grand Avenue contains the town’s schools and churches, perhaps the least likely place to have put them.

This diagram, drawn by Howard himself, shows the essential monumentality of his design conceptions, notably in the Grand Avenue, a 420 foot wide ceremonial promenade, and the Crystal Palace, a completely enclosed commercial arcade of glass and steel.

In “Social Cities”, the scheme is extended to deal with the problem of growth, and is perhaps the most original of Howard’s proposals. As the original settlement expands to the anticipated limit of 32,000 all new growth is to be channeled beyond the agricultural belt into a second grand city. In Fig-4 below, Howard presents… a very rough drawing representing, as I conceive, the true principle, the idea of “…always preserving a belt of country around our cities would ever be kept in mind, till, in course of time, we could have a cluster of cities.” the concept of a limitation to the size of cities and the formation of colonies when the original community had reached a specified size was a feature of the Greek City states and was also a part of several nineteenth century model village scheme, including the Owen settlements.

The idea of a group of cities clustered in such a way as to function as single unit appears to be new with Howard, add oddly enough, is the feature most often overlooked when considering the Garden City scheme. Though the Garden City has often been characterized as representing a small town or village ideal, it was in fact designed so that”…each inhabitant of the whole group, though in one sense living in a town of small size, would be, in reality, living in and would enjoy all the advantages of a great and most beautiful city.
This diagram illustrates the way in which the Garden City deals with Urban growth through the establishment of new colonies when the original settlement reaches its optimum size. It also shows the essentially urban nature of the scheme: this cluster, would have a population of 250,000 and be linked closely to other similar clusters.

5. CONCLUSION

Howard's basic concern was social reform, yet in calling his town “Garden City” he was setting an aesthetic standard. Town design is very prone to external influences and the response is not necessarily similar in the same conditions. But because previous standards have been set, the changes are significant. The main aesthetic came initially from the domestic work of such architects as Voysey and Norman Shaw's designs in the first Garden Suburb at Bedford Park, London in 1876. These aesthetic influences have had a much greater effect on social conditions today than reforms in living conditions because of the early works and an ability to relate to them. This has been shown in the little change in internal house design and amenities, although popular house size has a positive correlation with living standards, throughout the period. Indeed Charles Voysey's designs were copied between the wars by speculative builders, being put forward as "primitive" antiquarian and thus functional. The "medieval style" has gradually dampened although Sitte’s “Der Stadtebau” (1889) still illustrates our adherence in town design to an attractive picturesque "Townscape" charm, and effective progression from the formal to the irregular. Other important aspects derived from the early Garden Cities and Unwind are the flexible plan, and its heavy reliance on the site. There was present a constant drive to retain the beauty and not to destroy but improve the natural aspects of the site on development.

REFERENCES


