

SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY AND “LEGACY LANDSCAPES”

RENEWED RELEVANCE FOR
THE GARDEN CITIES OF YESTERDAY

Nicola Szibbo

AUTHOR BIO

Dr. Nicola Szibbo is currently an Adjunct Professor in the Global Leadership and Sustainable Development (GLSD) program at Hawai'i Pacific University (HPU), Affiliate Faculty in the Department of Urban and Regional Planning (DURP) at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, and a practicing city and regional planner at the City and County of Honolulu. Dr. Szibbo obtained both her Master of City Planning (MCP) and PhD in City and Regional Planning from the University of California—Berkeley, and her undergraduate degree in anthropology from the University of British Columbia (UBC).

ABSTRACT

This piece pays tribute to a great scholar and urbanist, Sir Peter Hall, who was concerned with the social and economic vitality of neighborhoods. In his 1988 book, *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*, Hall writes about the Garden City, exploring both the original vision as imagined by Ebenezer Howard and the global diaspora of Howard's ideas. Hall also discusses the theoretical contribution of Garden Cities today, especially with regard to issues of social equity and social sustainability. This piece critically re-examines the Garden City concept, including its utopian social origins, its implementation on a global scale, and its impact on current planning theory and practice. I illustrate how Hall and others have affected the canonical garden cities literature, and have created a “legacy landscape” concept that is still relevant today in new sustainable development.

SEEKING A NEW VISION OF SOCIETY

The historical urban backdrop of Victorian England provided the impetus for the Garden City concept to materialize. During this period, agricultural depression had forced many laborers into increasingly crowded cities. These economic migrants perceived the city as an environment that would provide higher-wage jobs and more plentiful social opportunities. A dichotomized portrayal of city and country thus emerged in literature and the arts: the countryside was perceived as aromatic, bucolic place but clearly lacking in social life. This pastoral Eden was contrasted against the chaos of the industrial city—a glorified place of opportunity and social life, yet saddled with dense, slum-like housing conditions and dismal public health (Mumford 1946, 49). Writers such as Charles Dickens, Charles Kingsley, and John Ruskin aroused compunction for the urban industrial poor, while concurrently imbuing countryside life with pastoral accolades (Osborn 1950).

The main social impetus behind the Garden City movement was the conundrum of how to create an enhanced form of modern industrial life in England, which would incorporate the best of the city and the country. A major concern at this time was rapidly densifying cities, and how to balance the opportunities of the city with the natural benefits of rural life (Forsyth 2011). F. J. Osborne (1965) notes that alternatives to the two extremes of city and countryside living had never before been seriously proposed—Ebenezer Howard was the first visionary to do so. In this sense, Howard created a precedent that would cause a chain-reaction in the world of planning, design and development.

Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, originally published in 1898 as a treatise *To-Morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* and later elaborated upon in 1902, was the first pivotal work to establish a theory of how to improve the material condition of working-class families through a vision for new communities that would provide a higher quality of urban life (Parsons and Schuyler 2002). While

most critics today conceive of Howard's work as a purely physical planning and urban design phenomenon, it is evident that Howard's efforts were rooted in a complex social vision.

Howard's influences for his social plan included a wide spectrum of philosophers and social theorists. With regard to land nationalization and tenure, Howard was influenced by both Herbert Spencer and Thomas Spence, who suggested that the purchase of large tracts of farmland could be made by a community at bargain prices, and the returns entered into a community coffer (Osborn 1950, 230). Peter Kropotkin's anarcho-communist writings praised local, small-scale agriculture, workshop society, and the value and 'craft' of intellectual work. Furthermore, Kropotkin's communitarian visions of decentralized industry and more intensive worker cultivation formed the basis of Howard's agenda (Larice and Macdonald 2007). From the writings of Charles Booth and General William Booth, Howard was swayed by the notion of paternal labor colonies, wherein people would be allowed to live as families organized into industrial groups, situated in agricultural smallholding colonies and working in small-scale industries (Hall 1988, 90). Howard agreed with the notion of agricultural smallholding communities, but not in a paternal manner. Instead, he favored Kropotkin's anarchism, which refused to subordinate the individual to the group. Additionally, Boston social reformer Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* fused futuristic "Christian socialism with scientific mechanization" (Osborn 1950, 229), inspiring Howard to reject centralized and state socialism and re-think how cooperative goodwill could be leveraged to produce a better society on an experimental scale.

IMPACTS ON PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN THEORY

Howard's well-intentioned program for creating a Garden City demonstrates a targeted effort to mitigate the above-mentioned urban social and public health concerns. However, the social and development models underpinning the concept are often lost. In Howard's vision, a philanthropic group of citizens would establish a limited-dividend company, raise 240,000 pounds in capital and buy land at depressed, "rock-bottom" agricultural land prices. Land would be vested in the hands of trustees. The company would then arrange for leading industrialists of the time to move to the purchased land. Workers would move to the land and build their own houses. Next came the planned agglomeration and extension of satellite cities. Inter-city rail connections would create a polycentric urban form, connecting the existing city to the country by a twelve-minute commute. Finally, the development and growth of such a garden city would raise the land values, enabling the trustees to pay off the mortgage and generate a fund to provide a local welfare state. In essence, Howard (1965) had imagined a planning and implementation process whereby rising urban land values would be reinvested in the community. The complete rejection of a controlling state government and the idealization of local management and self-government, as represented by charitable and philanthropic organizations, remains a uniquely altruistic planning model. However, the governance aspects and land trust elements have been mostly ignored in comparison to what has been immortalized in popular planning and urban design literature. Ultimately, it is the physical characteristics and schemata of Howard's Garden Cities, rather than Howard's altruistic vision, that have remained prominent in planning history and urban design theory.

This is somewhat ironic, given that Howard was much more interested in social processes than physical form and design (Mumford 1946). The well-known principal physical characteristics that have come to define the Garden City are: 1) a fixed growth limit (32,000 people), 2) 1,000 acres of land, 3) a central open space, 4) radial boulevards connected by ring roads, 5) peripheral industry, 6) a greenbelt of 5,000 acres which is preserved for agricultural uses, and 7) the inclusion of public buildings, churches, and schools. Today, concepts of growth management and urban growth boundaries draw on both Howard's theories of fixed limits to growth and his drawings of city greenbelts and urban growth boundaries. Zoning—the separation of different land uses as a tool intended to rectify incompatibility—also derives from Howard's plans to keep industry segregated and on the periphery, rather than near housing or commercial uses.

GARDEN CITIES IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

The first designers to transform Howard's concepts into a built reality were Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker. Both Unwin and Parker were influenced heavily by the Fabian Society and socialist traditions of William Morris, which explains why they so readily appropriated Howard's idyllic "town-country magnet." Letchworth, their first Garden City, was located thirty-four miles from London, and failed to realize many of Howard's original ideals. Unwin and Parker deviated from Howard's principle of separate uses as the industrial land had to be situated near the core of the development, since that was where the rail line bisected the site. Moreover, Howard's social vision was largely disregarded. In effect, there was no legal transfer of land to the community. Residents chose ninety-nine-year leases over the five- to ten-year "Howard Lease," and there was a massive failure to pay dividends on time as only half of the projected income was realized (Hall 1988, 97). The element of a community land trust was sorely missing in the final development project.

Unwin and Parker soon redirected their energies to Hampstead Garden, another development that also could not live up to Howard's original vision. Despite advocacy from such willful proponents

as Dame Henrietta Barnett (Miller 2002), Hampstead Garden was ultimately proclaimed a "suburb," as it contained no industry, and the proposed tube station was never implemented. Both Unwin and Parker were equally interested in the idea of social income mixing, but the removal of smaller, less expensive cottages negated all hope for an equitable housing mix—a continuing problem for later "Garden Suburb" developments. Joseph Rowntree, Unwin, and Parker's New Earswick (1902-1904) Garden Suburb in York certainly maintained this trend: the standard of design was so high that lower-income residents could not afford to live there (Hall 1988, 100). Despite deviation from the original vision, the Garden City movement was later engulfed by the British New Town movement, which campaigned for many of the same principles (Alexander 2009).

INTERNATIONAL GARDEN CITIES

Although Garden Cities are generally perceived in the literature to be the brainchild of Howard alone, other Garden City movements in parts of Europe were developing contemporaneously with the UK movement. The next section addresses the Garden City diaspora, with a focus on Europe and the United States, where his ideas took hold the strongest.

Britain was not the only "hotseat" of Garden City development—Garden Cities also began to evolve at the turn of the century in Germany (Hartmann 1976; Schubert 2004), France (Pouvreau et al. 2007; Villes des Suresnes 1998; Benoît-Lévy 1904), Belgium (Archives d'Architecture Moderne 1994; Uyttenhove 1990), Italy (Province of Milan 2012), the United States, Canada, Australia (Freestone 1989; Home 1990), colonial Africa (Bigon 2013; Bigon and Katz 2014), Palestine (Bigon and Katz 2014; Zaidman and Kark 2015), and Brazil (Rego 2014). Although there are a plethora of Garden City examples, this section examines four international cases of early adopters of the Garden City movement—Germany, France, Italy, and United States—cases that ultimately illustrate the challenges of implementing Howard's original ideas abroad.

GERMANY

There has been some discussion of who founded the Garden City concept, and the right to authorship of the concept. Theodor Fritsch (1852-1933), a German contemporary to Howard, claimed authorship of the idea of Garden Cities in 1896 in his book *Die Stadt der Zukunft*, later published in 1912 as *Gardenstadt*. Dirk Schubert (2004) examined the authorship issue, and concluded that Fritsch's work did not pre-empt Howard's original vision as it was largely overshadowed by the ideology of the National Socialist Party. The German Garden City Association almost completely ignored his work, although it is evident that he did play a major role in developing the neighborhoods of Eden (1903) and Heimland (1908). German industrialists at the time believed that the Garden City movement had spurred British industrial production, and should thus be copied and executed as a model on home soil in order to maintain industrial and economic competitiveness. The example of the village of Margarethenhöhe in Essen in the Ruhrgebiet resembles a physically transplanted New Earswick, in which Georg Metzendorf faithfully adapted the Unwin-Parker model—a small town with a miniature greenbelt, curving streets, and central market square from which traffic is excluded (Hall 1988, 115). Designers Ernst May and Martin Wagner both took inspiration from the Garden City movement, and shared a belief in a "new social partnership between capital and labor, and a reintegration of working and living" (Hall 1988, 118-119). Although they believed in the power of the collective, the May-Wagner partnership diverged from the Kropotkin-esque aspects of the Howard-Unwin-Parker tradition in favor of efficiency and eventually the architectural style of International Modernism (Land 1986: 286). Ultimately, the garden city movement in Germany took a functionalist turn in the 1920s and 1930s, in which uniformity (versus variation in architectural style) was privileged, as can be seen in the design of such developments as Siemensstadt in 1931 and Onkel-Toms-Hutte in 1931 in Berlin. Interestingly, Wagner did not believe in satellite cities, but instead promoted the concept of "Siedlung"—whereby houses were grouped around a factory, in close proximity to the city.

FRANCE

In France, the Garden City concept flourished, but the execution was not quite as accurate as Germany during this period (Miller 2002, 13). In fact, Hall (1988, 114) claims that the French vision of the Garden City was immediately misunderstood. Georges Benoît-Lévy, in *La Cité Jardin* (1904), managed to confuse the concepts of "Garden City" and "Garden Suburb," in which "Garden Suburbs" were built on the fringe of large cities and lacking industry—requiring the transport of workers to jobs in the central city. This was a conflation from which French planners never extricated themselves. La Cité-jardin de Suresnes (1928-1932) was one of the first applications of the Garden City on French soil, on the southwest outskirts of Paris (Miller 2002; Villes des Suresnes 1998). The development's architecture was recognizably "Anglais," with distinctive gabled cottages that were incredibly similar to Letchworth. Suresnes deviated slightly from the Unwin-Parker model in that designer Henri Sellier wanted to replicate the famous Parisian Haussmann boulevards, so he increased the overall density of the development and introduced apartment blocks in order to have a more clearly defined and enclosed street wall. While Suresnes grew out of the Garden City legacy, it also provided a new model for implementing higher-density housing at the same time. Unwin himself had described a similar quadrangle block form and urban green center in his work *Nothing Gained by Overcrowding* (1912). And although Tony Garnier's famous Cité Industrielle was conceived in 1898, with its similar emphasis on common property and provincial craft culture, it is unlikely that Garnier was significantly influenced by Howard's work, and his work was not published until 1917 (Hall 1988, 113).

ITALY

In Italy, the first efforts at Garden City planning originated in Milan in 1907 under the initiative of Luigi Buffoli, who attempted to build the Garden Suburb Milanino. Buffoli was the founder and president of a cooperative union, founded in 1886, which aimed to help the struggling middle class with their everyday needs. Ultimately, the union's goal was to build "safe, affordable small houses" for local residents (Province of Milan 2012). Two-story buildings were planned, with generous space for gardens. However, the develop-

ment is considered to be only semi-complete, due to a financial crisis spurred by the failure to bring the high-speed tramline into the city center that prevented the union from completing the settlement during the 1920s.

Post-war Garden City efforts in Italy included the INA-CASA developments aimed at the provision of mass housing in a period of reconstruction. The intent was to provide working class quarters and housing that was adjacent to nearby cities, so not completely self-sufficient in terms of a jobs-housing balance. In most instances, such as the Borgo Paniele development near Bologna, the provision of affordable housing was aimed at one particular socio-economic class, and the population expected in the development was significantly less than 30,000 people that Howard had envisioned (Pilat 2009). Although well serviced by a railway, the location factor of being close to a city such as Bologna precluded the development from ever qualifying as a true self-sufficient, independently functioning conurbation.

THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, Clarence Stein and Henry Wright were the first innovators to adapt the Garden City model to the American context. After seeing firsthand the designs and developments of Letchworth and Hampstead Garden, the designers translated these concepts to the Radburn Plan for a potential development in New Jersey. Despite an optimistic outlook, the Radburn Plan was never fully implemented, as the Great Depression hit before the development could reach build-out. One of the most striking departures from the Unwin-Parker model is that Stein and Wright configured the Radburn Plan to adapt to the growing use of the personal automobile (Southworth and Ben-Joseph 2003). With a car-friendly, gridiron pattern, Radburn earned the title the "Town for the Motor Age." Yet, with large-scale superblocks, abundant cul-de-sacs, and a precise separation of vehicular traffic from pedestrians through a rigid transportation hierarchy, Radburn was unfortunately no more than a glorified suburb.

However, Stein and Wright's Radburn Plan led the way for further neighborhood-scale planning in the United States. The greenbelt

movement arose, in sync with Clarence Perry's "Neighborhood Unit" (Perry 1929), undeniably drawing inspiration from the "self-sufficient" unit aspect readily apparent in Howard's work. Today, Fishman (2011) notes that the Unwin tradition of the "Garden Suburb" has been most strongly appropriated by the Congress for the New Urbanism (CNU), a traditionalist design movement founded in 1993.

A CRITIQUE OF THE EVOLUTION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE GARDEN CITY CONCEPT

The evolution and legacy of the Garden City can be critiqued from a variety of angles. First, the concept can be scrutinized through the lens of social theory, as most designers chose to draw primarily on Howard's physical features to define their notion of a Garden City rather than drawing on Howard's steps for a communitarian-based planning process. Howard's legacy became one of environmental determinism and physical planning, rather than self-sufficient, communitarian neighborhoods. Susan Fainstein (2000, 464) notes that recent movements such as New Urbanism, which take physical planning and urban design inspiration from the Garden City but do not include the original social and communitarian processes, are doomed to fail in the same way that Howard's original vision was ultimately defeated:

To achieve investor backing for his schemes, Howard was forced to trade away his aims of a socialist commonwealth and a city that accommodated all levels of society (Fishman 1977). The new urbanists must also rely on private developers to build and finance their visions; consequently, they are producing only slightly less exclusive suburbs than the ones they dislike.

As Fainstein points out, due to the systematic reliance of urban development on the capitalist model of housing finance, Howard's utopian vision of communitarianism will inevitably be difficult to implement in modern planning practice. Emily Talen (2002) is also widely critical of the social goals of New Urbanism, stating that the concept of "community" is not invoked or supported strongly enough in its ideology.

The second critique of the Garden City addresses the issue of affordability and social equity—one of the three pillars of Wheeler’s (2004) “sustainability” theory. Howard’s original vision intended for there to be ample housing for working class residents, integrating different classes of people into the community. Although many of the original Garden City developments intended to follow this vision, the reality is that these Garden City and Garden Suburb developments incurred such high design and construction costs that land values and rent values began to rise dramatically. For example, Hampstead Garden Suburb was originally intended to be a place where “the poor shall teach the rich, and the rich, let us hope, shall help the poor to help themselves” (Hall 1988, 103), but in the end lost its high social purposes as it became a refuge for the affluent. Striving for social equity (but ultimately failing) is definitively a long-lasting legacy of Garden Suburbs, and has also plagued New Urbanist developments: only about half of New Urbanist projects in the United States include housing that is affordable to low-income households (Johnson and Talen 2008). New evidence from Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design for Neighborhood Development-certified “sustainable” communities shows that only 40 percent of new developments are incorporating affordable housing into their neighborhood plans (Szibbo 2016a). If new developments purport to be sustainable, then they ultimately need to consider affordability as a significant component of social sustainability, and not just rely on the environmental and economic indicators that are often easier to quantify (Szibbo 2016b). A greater concern for resident livability and important social factors needs to be acknowledged in any new community purporting to live up to Howard’s ideals.

The third major critique pertains to the physical planning aspects of the Garden City. The successful implementation of non-vehicular transportation through fixed rail, subway, or metro is an integral part of Howard’s vision in connecting the garden city to the wider region—a polycentric expansion with access to a wide range of jobs and services. In many cases, such as in Milanino, Italy, and in Hampstead Garden Suburb, the failure to see such a system built contributed to its development as either an isolated, exclusive enclave or as semi-complete neighborhood. In addition, the erasure of the industrial component and active employed labor force in many Garden Suburbs led to the rise of bedroom communities, and ultimately in-

creased reliance on the private motor vehicle. The jobs-housing balance—what planners now refer to as “live-work-play” model—that Howard had envisioned was thus not realized in developments such as Borgo Paniele. This is ironic, as Ann Forsyth (2011, 371) notes that Howard’s Garden City was purposefully compact and self-contained in order to minimize problems typical to suburban life—there should be a complete menu of housing opportunities, jobs, and population groups and little need for long commutes. Essentially, the spatial mismatch between housing and jobs that has resulted in the production of “bedroom” or “dormitory” communities is another unintended legacy of the garden cities movement.

With regard to density, while Mumford (1946:31-32) has noted that Howard’s density calculations were somewhat conservative and overly reliant on the model of the single-family home, it could be argued that, in continental Europe, the Garden City encouraged a higher-density form of development in such cases as Suresnes, Essen, and Berlin. In contrast, in North America, it is unfortunately clear that the more suburban interpretation of Howard’s idea led to a predominance of single-family homes with the initiation of greenbelt cities and the supremacy of the automobile. However, it may also be conversely argued that the more recent re-surfacing of Garden City principles in New Urbanism and traditional neighborhood development (TND) has led to a push for higher-density living; on average, the mean gross residential density of New Urbanist development is approximately seventy-six percent higher than adjacent conventional suburban areas (Gordon and Vapon 2005). New Urbanist development is clearly an improvement over suburban sprawl, yet many metropolitan regions are still witnessing the conversion of greenfields and agriculture to subdivisions at an appalling rate.

PAVING THE PATHWAY FOR GREEN NEIGHBORHOODS

Although Howard’s Garden City and its various iterations around the world can be heavily critiqued on the subject of failing social and economic sustainability, it is clear that Howard’s vision (alongside Frederick Law Olmstead’s) on an environmental front has prompted the planning practice to widely incorporate green infrastructure at

the city scale. Howard perceived the importance of incorporating green areas into the asphalt jungle, and that by including such natural elements, residents would have a better quality of life. His work has become the antecedent for both greenway and greenbelt planning (Walmsley 1995; Kühn 2003) and landscape ecology planning (Steiner, Young, and Zube 1988). The marriage between town and country allowed for the introduction of large parks and open spaces into dense urban areas—creating a clean environment free from water and air pollution and protected from encroaching development (Clark 2003). Howard also envisioned that long-term sustainability was based on abiding the “law of restitution,” whereby waste was recycled back into the agricultural soil in order to ensure the continued productivity of the land [Clark 2003]. Such holistic, lofty aspirations were demonstrative of bridging citywide metabolic rifts, and evocative of an ecological imperative. Overall, Howard’s Garden City provided a visionary model for sustainability in which nature and culture were both integrated.

IN MEMORIAM

This essay is dedicated to Sir Peter Hall, and the scholarly pursuit of Garden City theory around the world. This article peels away the palimpsest that currently obscures the original premise of Garden Cities as envisioned by Ebenezer Howard, and illustrates how such concepts were co-opted and realized differently by various countries in varying contexts. Ultimately, it illuminates how Howard’s original vision for social sustainability has been transformed and incorporated into both the planning and the implementation phases of neighborhood development. Although the planning disciplines now often focus on Garden Cities as a schematic design concept, we have Hall and others to thank for re-articulating the original social utopian aspirations of these “legacy landscapes.” Indeed, Hall’s research on Howard provides valuable lessons for visioning and implementing new sustainable development.

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