

**THE GARDEN CITY: AN ENDURING MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE URBANIZATION**

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## A WIDELY DIFFUSED MODEL

Many influential commentators – such as Sir Peter Hall or Lewis Mumford – see the garden city as the most potent and enduring planning model to have emerged from the Western tradition of urban planning. Created by the English visionary Ebenezer Howard in 1898, as a recipe for urban problems and rural ills, it soon occupied a central position in the new practice of urban planning that developed during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Garden city experiments embodying at least some of the model's key principles quickly appeared throughout Europe and North America. Knowledge of the model was spread by colonialism, trading or other links to many other parts of the world. There was also a keen interest in the ideas in the early Soviet Union.

Over time these widely diffused garden city's principles were synthesised with other planning ideas into new forms of planned development with varying degrees of resemblance to the original model. The paper will briefly draw attention to some significant examples and variants of the garden city tradition in different parts of the world and over time. It will also make the important point that, although priorities may have changed, it is an idea that has never gone away. Even as society and professional opinions have changed, the model has become relevant in new ways that its early pioneers did not entirely foresee.

## A FLEXIBLE AND ADAPTABLE MODEL

Why has this been so? The paper will briefly consider some of the key reasons. In large part, its flexibility and adaptability as a model has helped, allowing certain strands to be emphasised as wider agendas have changed. As with other movements, that which promoted the garden city model had its purist wing. But the dominant tendency has always been rather pragmatic. In different circumstances, therefore, the garden city has become a model to achieve metropolitan decentralisation, regional economic growth, rural consolidation, or sustainable living. It has been adapted for more motorised societies, while never entirely losing its potential to minimise auto-dependence. Similarly, there has been flexibility over size and many garden city principles were adapted so that they could be applied at larger or smaller scales. The physical form of places owing allegiance to the garden city model has also varied, though extensive green space, public and private, has always been a very important element.

## THE CORE PRINCIPLES

Yet, as the paper will also show, this flexibility was never so great as to strip all real meaning from the garden city model. What has endured has been the desire to find a balance between three key goals: *strong community, ordered development and environmental quality*. It has also involved a solution that did not rely entirely on either private capitalism or state intervention. Instead it found a way of harnessing the two. One of the core principles that have been central to this was that the garden city was had to be built on *land under unified ownership managed in the public interest*. This was to remain under unified control after development was completed. This feature has allowed the other core principle: that a significant element of the additional value of land created by development would be enjoyed by the citizens of the garden city. This additional value would be available as better collective facilities and quality of public and private environment than could be provided under a purely private development process, where individual developers would keep the whole of the increased land value as profit. The consequence of this is that it is not pre-destined to be only an exclusive environment for the rich. Without need for extensive state subsidies, it offers the promise of an inclusive way of living that is affordable to a much wider income range.

## CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF THE GARDEN CITY MODEL

The key priority of today is to provide for urban growth while minimising damaging impacts on the environment. A declining part of this urban growth in the future will be based on crude population growth. A key part of it will be driven by, and need to respond to, the rising social expectations consequent on economic prosperity. People in a more affluent society want a better quality of living space in their own homes and a better quality of environment and facilities in the wider setting of their lives. The garden city's emphases on just these aspects, funded to a large extent from the collective retention of development land values, are very important here. This was the great appeal of the garden city model in the more developed and increasingly affluent countries of the twentieth century. It ensured that developments created on core garden city principles have invariably remained very popular places for people to live in the long term.

Critics have argued about the wider environmental impacts of the garden city. However, it has certainly allowed some biodiversity to persist within the urban area. It has also promoted a clustering of public and private services and, to some extent, employment, which have reduced the necessity for extensive car-based movement. Moreover, although there are easier, cruder ways of dealing with growth problems in the short term, such approaches will almost certainly need to be revisited after a short period. All modes of development involve some trade offs between different values. The most dynamic forms of development have less regard for environmental or community values. The most environmentally protectionist modes of development compromise the quality of the living environment and certainly inhibit economic development. The attractiveness of the garden city model is that it offers a way of achieving balanced development that is also affordable and attractive to a widening social range.

Although awareness of the garden city model spread across the world in the twentieth century, for the vast majority of people – including large numbers in the most affluent countries – it remained an unattainable dream. The spread of material prosperity across wider sections of the world that will occur in the twenty-first century now offers more scope for the promise of the garden city model to be realised. China now has an opportunity even greater than that which the West had in the twentieth century to use and adapt that model to shape its own urbanisation. If it succeeds, the world will be in its debt.