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10

THE GARDEN CITY CAMPAIGN: AN OVERVIEW

Dennis Hardy

At the beginning of the twentieth century two great new inventions took form before our eyes: the aeroplane and the Garden City, both harbingers of a new age: the first gave man wings and the second promised him a better dwelling-place when he came down to earth. (Lewis Mumford, in his preface to the 1946 edition of Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, p. 29.)

With hindsight, writing in the last decade of the twentieth century, it is difficult to be even-handed about Mumford's above assessment of aeroplanes and garden cities. Both were, indeed, harbingers of a new age, and the technology was in place to achieve all that was promised. But there the similarity ends.

While few would dispute the enormous impact, in peace and in war, of the aeroplane, the garden city offers a different story. In its intended form (as purists would have it) attempts to put it into practice have been few and far between, and, for all its technical simplicity as compared with the aeroplane, it has nowhere achieved its potential. Ebenezer Howard's original vision of communities owning their own land in partnership, in small, detached settlements that could provide those who lived there with all their needs (including the benefits of a good environment) remains a pipedream for most people. Various obstacles have served to constrain the fulfilment of an idea that was, in principle, very easy to put into practice. It might, to modify Mumford's appraisal of the impact of these two great inventions, be concluded that the aeroplane took off while the garden city remained grounded.

In fact, tempting though such generalizations are, an assessment of garden cities in the twentieth century is rather more complex. Although the Mark 1 version has remained a collector's item – and even a pilgrimage to the world's first garden city at Letchworth, Hertfordshire, will demonstrate important points of difference with Howard's original blueprint (Adams, 1903) – the global impact of the concept is considerable. As a model for decentralization to small settlements, characterized by a humane environment for all to enjoy, it has played a significant role in the past and continues to do so. Indeed, this acknowledgement of a continuing role for garden cities provides a basis for retracing some of the steps along an earlier campaign trail. This is not simply a journey down memory lane, but can more usefully be taken to shed light on current developments. Throughout its history the garden city idea has been actively promoted, and we might reasonably ask what form this campaign has taken and how it has been adapted over the years to meet new circumstances? How effective was it, and what lessons can be drawn for a continuing quest for what has always been at the heart of the garden city movement, namely, provision of a decent, sustainable environment?

A common implication of these questions is that ideas alone are not enough, but that to gain widespread acceptance they have to be actively promoted. In the case of the aeroplane, promotion was largely in the hands of military and commercial interests; for garden cities we will find more altruistic motives. Either way, the campaign is the fuel that drives the motor.

GETTING ON THE AGENDA

The first and overwhelmingly important response to the Victorian city was the garden-city concept of Ebenezer Howard . . . (Hall, 1988, p. 8)

With the benefit of hindsight, one may quite plausibly claim for the garden city a leading role in the saga of urban reform. At the time of the conception of the idea in the 1890s, however, the historical importance of the idea was certainly not obvious. Howard, the social inventor, made a number of false starts (Beevers, 1988) before the publication in 1898 of his book, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform.* Even then, for all his own personal conviction in the significance of his proposals, it might well have suffered the fate of other social panaceas before and since, as just another good idea of no practical importance. The numerous reviews that the book attracted reflected a degree of cynicism as well as enthusiasm; critics, especially socialists, dismissed it as utopian and a digression from where the main efforts to change society should be directed. (Beevers, 1988, pp. 57–58)

However, what marks out the garden city from other ideas of, arguably, equal merit, and sets it on its twentieth-century course of widespread adoption is the early formation of a pressure group to promote the idea. Eight months after the publication of *To-morrow*, in June 1899, a small group of friends and associates met with Howard in the City office of Alexander Payne (Treasurer of the Land Nationalisation Society, and just one of six members of that organization present at the meeting) to prepare the ground for what was to be initiated a few days later as the Garden City Association. The new organization was constituted with just two aims – to promote the ideas in Howard's book and to set in motion plans for the building of the first garden city. Well-intentioned but with little substance the Garden City Association was initially more effective on the first front than the second, its members 'talkers' rather than 'doers'. A first attempt to raise capital for a garden city project failed, and it was only from 1901 when an eminent barrister, Ralph Neville, became Chairman and appointed Thomas Adams as full-time Secretary that the Association moved beyond a worthy but ineffective role of discussion group.

Adams very quickly enhanced the standing of the Association and took the garden city idea to a wider audience, with the aid of two well-publicized national conferences, the first in Bournville in 1901 and the second (attracting more than a thousand delegates) at Port Sunlight in the following year. Both conferences were widely reported in the press, new members joined the movement, and a leading activist in years to come later reflected that these events were 'decisive steps in the propaganda which led to the creation of Letchworth' (Purdom, 1951, p. 25). Indeed, the quickening of the debate and progress towards the establishment of the first garden city went hand in hand. Shortly after the Port Sunlight conference, in July 1902, the First Garden City Pioneer Company was formed, and, under Neville's leadership, the company won the support of industrialists like Edward and George Cadbury, Alfred Harmsworth, W. L. Lever and T. W. Idris. The required capital was raised, and within a few months, in the Spring of 1903, contracts were signed for a greenfield site in Hertfordshire. Its work completed, the Pioneer Company was

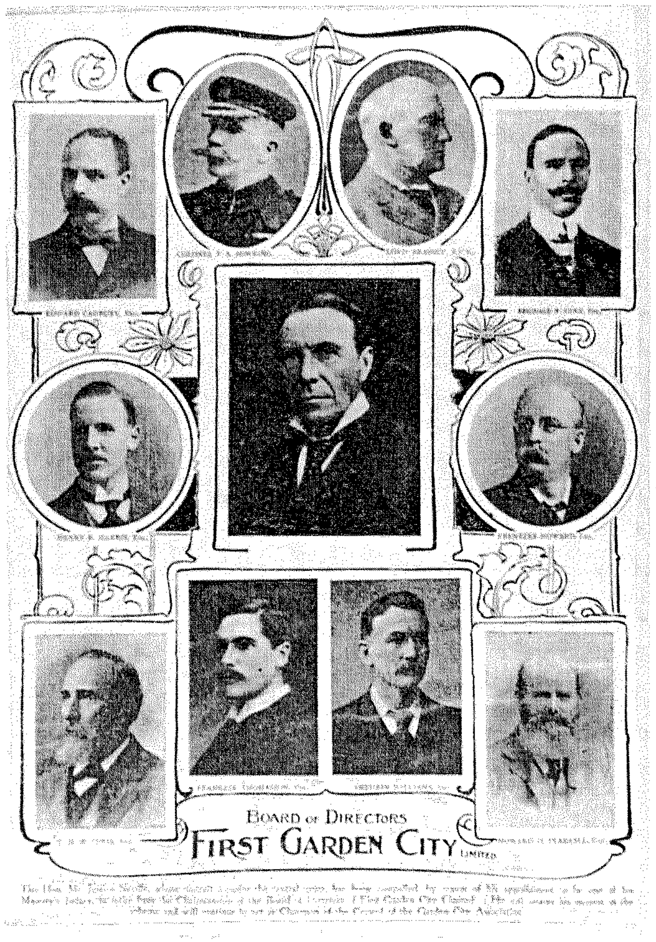


Figure 10.1. The directors of First Garden City Limited. Ralph Neville (centre) was a key figure in 'respectablising' the whole movement. Other directors include Edward Cadbury (top left), Howard himself (centre right) and Howard Pearsall, caricatured in figure 1.4 (bottom right).

duly wound up and superseded by First Garden City Ltd.

Although the subsequent story of the evolution of Letchworth is, in one sense, central to an understanding of the garden city in the twentieth century (see, especially, Miller, 1989) in another sense it provides only a partial view of what became a much wider campaign. The significance of Letchworth in relation to other interests was recognized by Thomas Adams as early as 1903. In an internal paper (Adams, 1903) he questions whether the future of the Association (and, implicitly, the whole of the garden city movement) should be bound up entirely with the fortunes of Letchworth, or whether it should concentrate on pursuing broader aims. His advice (which led to a redefinition of the aims of the Association) is

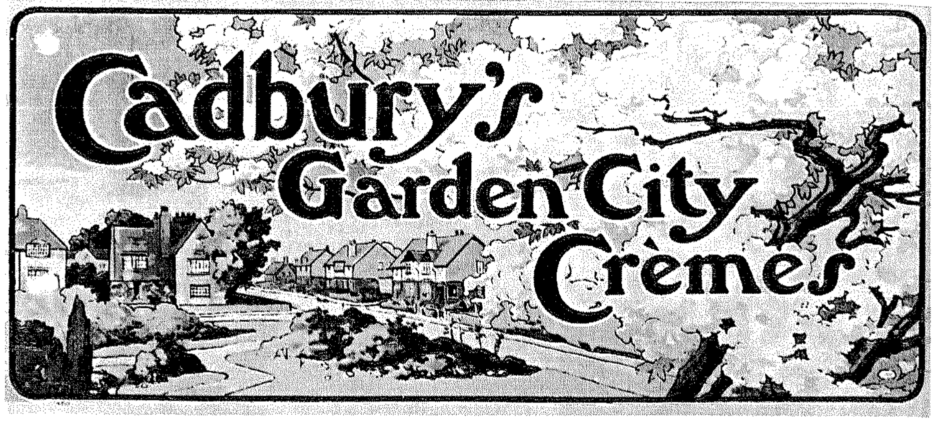


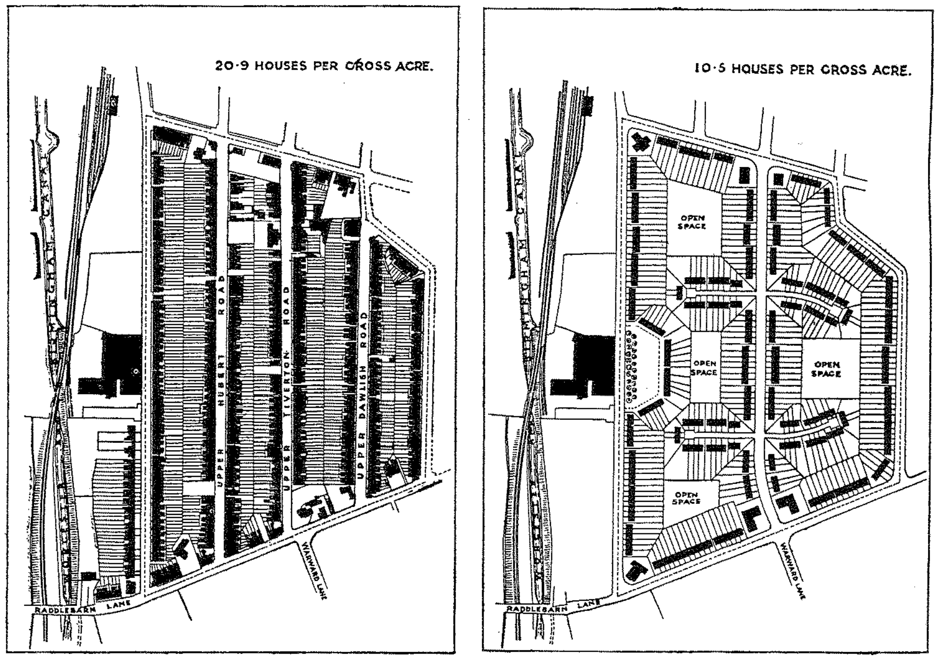
Figure 10.2. The garden city movement gained much from the support of businessmen like Cadbury and Lever. However there were also reciprocal advantages for manufacturers associating their products with the garden city 'image', as this box cover, portraying Bournville, quite explicitly suggests. It seems however to have been a pilot which was never marketed.

quite clear. The Association should see itself as an educational and propagandist body, leaving the practicalities of building Letchworth to the company formed for that purpose: 'The function of the Garden City Association is surely the higher one of the teaching of sound principles in regard to a particular aspect of social reform, and not in acting as an advertising agent of the Company' (Adams, 1903).

For the future of the British garden city movement (and, indirectly on how the garden city idea was spread to other countries), this redefinition of aims was significant. Letchworth (and Welwyn, in turn) was used to demonstrate the practical application of essential principles, rather than being seen simply as an end in itself. This very soon opened the way for the Association to adopt a still wider brief through attaching itself (and attempting to assume a leadership role) within an emerging lobby for town planning. Particularly in the hands of its new Secretary, Ewart Culpin, the Association was encouraged to throw its weight behind the campaign for national town planning legislation, on the basis that this provided the most effective means of achieving the kind of environment that Howard had originally envisaged.

Culpin, like Adams before him, was an effective propagandist, and he too organized national conferences to promote the case. The first of these, in March 1906, attracted 150 representatives from Parliament and from local authorities. More important was the second conference, in October 1907, which was held when legislation was already being drafted. An air of immediacy surrounded this, and every local authority was urged to prepare itself for the coming legislation.

Throughout 1907 and 1908 the propagandist work of the Association increased, and it was reported that 'a large part of the endeavours of the Association have been concentrated on the question of Town-planning' (Garden City Association, 1908a, p. 66), which pamphlets produced and lectures arranged in all parts of the country. In due course, with the passing of the 1909 Housing, Town Planning, etc. Act, a victory was claimed for the garden city movement. In the Tenth Annual Report of the Association



ACTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF AN ESTATE

THE SAME ESTATE ON GARDEN CITY LINES

Figures 10.3 and 10.4. Garden Suburb Revisionism in Birmingham. The principles of low-density residential development that characterized Letchworth (see figure 7.12) were soon being recommended for existing towns as an attractive alternative to monotonous streets of bylaw housing. Comparisons of the kind shown were common.

(when the legislation was still at a draft stage) the Association credited itself for preparing the political ground so thoroughly, and reference was made to a newspaper article which included the comment: 'Actually, of course, the authorship of the Bill belongs to Ebenezer Howard' (Garden City Association, 1908*a*).

Reflecting its wider interests, the passing of the Act was followed by a name change of the propagandist organization to that of Garden Cities and Town Planning Association. This was the way that Culpin thought that things should go, and other pioneers in the movement (like Thomas Adams, who assumed the chief planning role in the Local Government Board, and Raymond Unwin, one of the architects of Letchworth, who became the chief technical officer in the Ministry of Health) shared this view. But not everyone was so enthusiastic. Howard, for instance, could never reconcile himself to the idea of the State playing a major role in housing and environmental matters. He remained throughout his life a 'gentle anarchist', putting his faith in individuals and groups acting voluntarily to improve their own lives rather than devolving responsibility to a remote government body. After the First World War, when all around him were coming to accept the inevitability of an enhanced role for the State, Howard was unrepentant. 'If you wait for the

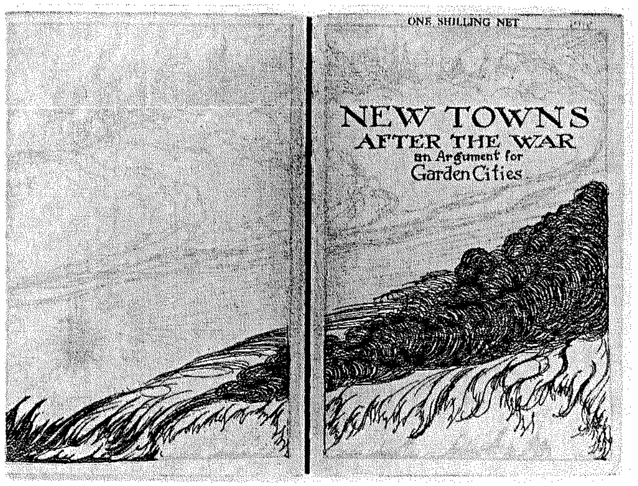


Figure 10.5. New Towns After The War (1918) marked a reassertion of 'purist' garden city thinking, but it also heralded the beginning of the process by which the concept was superseded by that of the statist New Town. Its message of the post-war reconstruction possibilities of the garden city model carried greater weight after World War II.

iovernment to do it you will be as old as Met-uselah before they start', he warned (quoted ı Osborn, 1970, p. 8) before going to Welwyn) initiate, almost single-handed, the second arden city.

It was not, however, the question of the role f the State which struck most directly at the eart of the garden city movement. Instead, ıe new town planning brief of the Association ıised the wider issue of whether there was any ınger an organization that existed solely to romote the idea of the garden city. While it ›uld be accepted that national legislation might ıcilitate the formation of additional garden ties, it could not be denied that such legisla-on would by no means be directed solely to ıch ends. Indeed, the Act was designed to lead ı improved standards of development in new ıburban extensions, rather than for the kind : venture which led to Letchworth as an auto-›mous settlement.

Culpin responded to these new possibilities ith enthusiasm, finding little difficulty in re-terpreting the essential creed of the garden ty. The future of the movement, he argued, y not in a preoccupation with garden cities in the mould of Letchworth, but in the promotion of a much broader swathe of developments 'on garden city lines'. In a review of progress in 1913, Culpin included not only Letchworth Garden City but also what were more properly termed garden suburbs and garden villages. He was referring to developments where, 'although the Garden City scheme may not be carried out in its entirety, there is the satisfaction of knowing that thousands of acres are being developed upon better lines than there was a probability of securing beforehand . . .' (Culpin, 1913, p. 9).

For some this pragmatism was all too much. During the First World War, when thoughts of reconstruction were in the air, a small group of 'fundamentalists' (led by another leading figure in the early movement, C. B. Purdom) got together to consider how best the movement might be drawn back to its essential and original task of promoting garden cities rather than hybrid schemes. According to Purdom, the Association was 'failing as custodian of the garden city idea' (Purdom, 1951, p. 61). One of their number, F. J. Osborn, was persuaded to write a small book, *New Towns after the War*

Figure 10.6. C. B. Purdom (1883–1965) led this reassertion of garden city ideas. He had begun as an assistant accountant at Letchworth in 1902, but soon became one of the leading figures in the movement.

(published in 1918 under the author's pseudonym of 'New Townsmen'), reaffirming a belief in the basic idea of the garden city (Osborn, 1918). The main body of the Association, which was meanwhile aligning itself with a national postwar housing campaign, thus found itself divorced from the cause that had brought it into being in the first place. This, it accepted, could not be allowed to continue without seriously harming the garden city movement as a whole and steps were duly taken to reincorporate the dissenters within the Association.

This episode of factional activity illustrates what is commonplace in any pressure group of longstanding, namely, that if it is to remain topical there will quite likely be periods of adjustment and reappraisal. What it also illustrates is that there was no unanimity as to what the garden city movement should be espousing; indeed, the very concept of the garden city was variously interpreted along the way. On one thing, though, there was agreement. The term 'garden city', used publicly for the first time time in 1898, had very soon become a part of the English language and, more importantly, an essential part of the political debate on housing and urban improvement. Writing shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, Culpin could claim that 'in less than a generation the Garden City movement has attained to a place of supreme importance throughout the world, and its founder has been hailed as one of the greatest men of his generation' (Culpin, 1913, pp. 12–13). Even allowing for some exaggeration, Culpin was right in asserting that the Association could take credit for promoting the idea of the garden city and for getting it onto the public agenda.

GARDEN CITIES AROUND THE WORLD

There is not a portion of the civilised world to which the Garden City message is not now being sent regularly. (Culpin, 1913, p. 10)

In their first phase of campaigning (through to the outbreak of the First World War) the proponents of garden cities succeeded not only in securing a place for their cause on the domestic political agenda but also in arousing interest worldwide. Howard himself was an internationalist who actively promoted the spread of Esperanto as well as his own garden cities. But it was not Howard personally so much as the garden city organization as a corporate body that was responsible (almost from the outset) for a global campaign.

The publication of *To-morrow* (soon to be translated into French, German, Russian and Czech) immediately caught the eye of overseas reviewers, and when the Garden City Association was formed it attracted correspondence from enquirers and fellow campaigners in various countries. As well as from within Europe, letters were received from as far away as Japan, the United States and Australia. The first International Garden City Congress was held in London in 1904, and overseas delegates – like

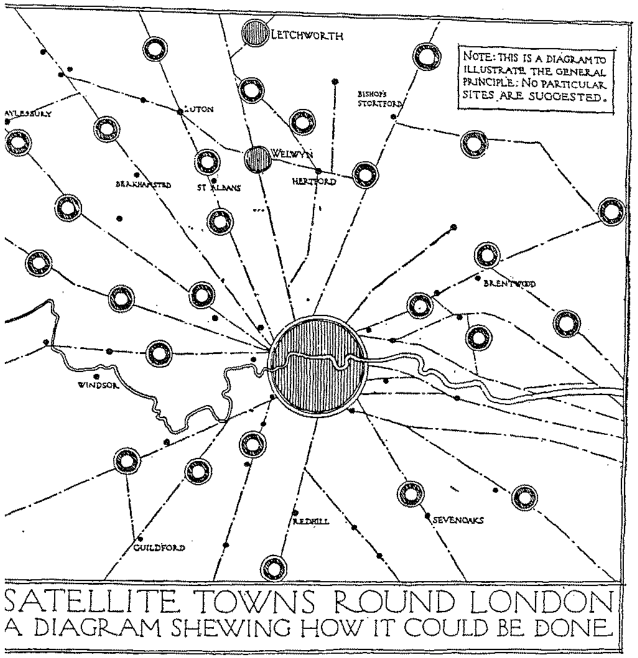
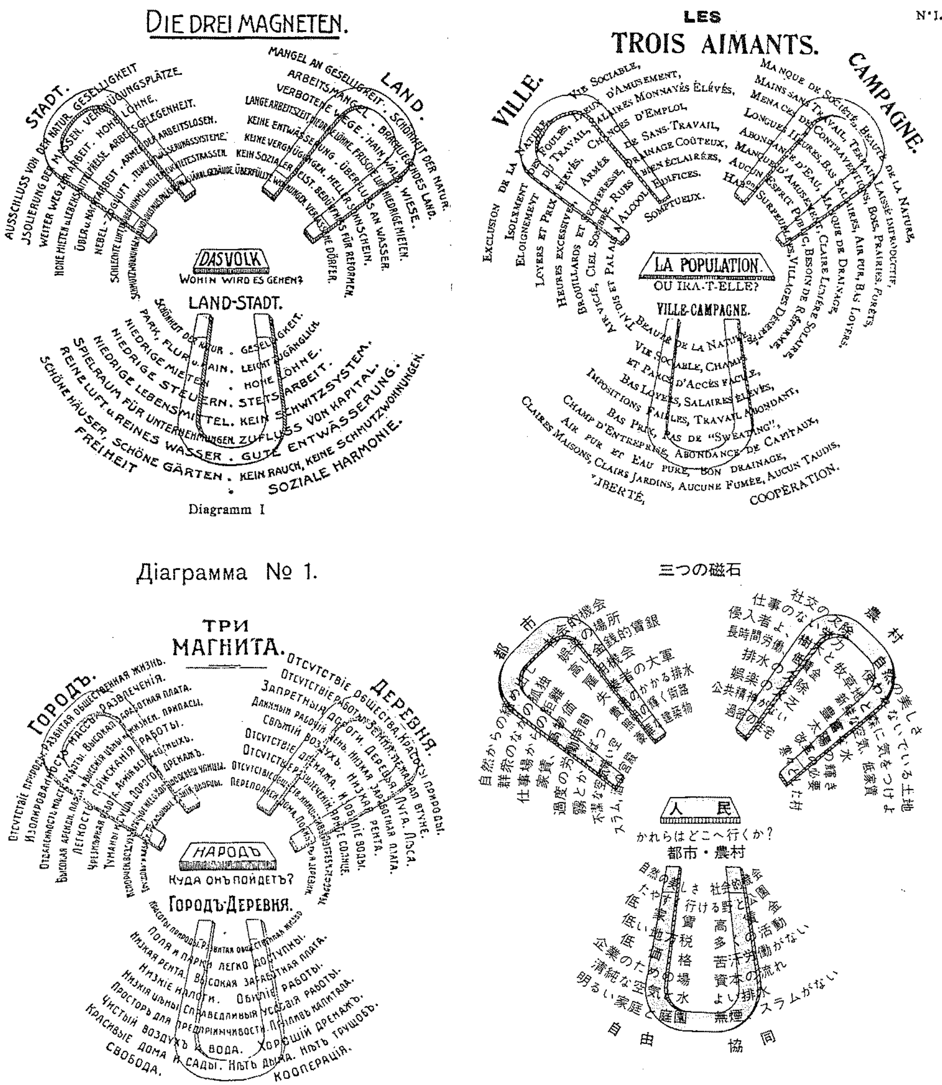


Figure 10.7. Purdom's 1920 proposals for a series of satellite towns around London were an early articulation of a scheme which, a quarter of a century later, became the new towns programme.

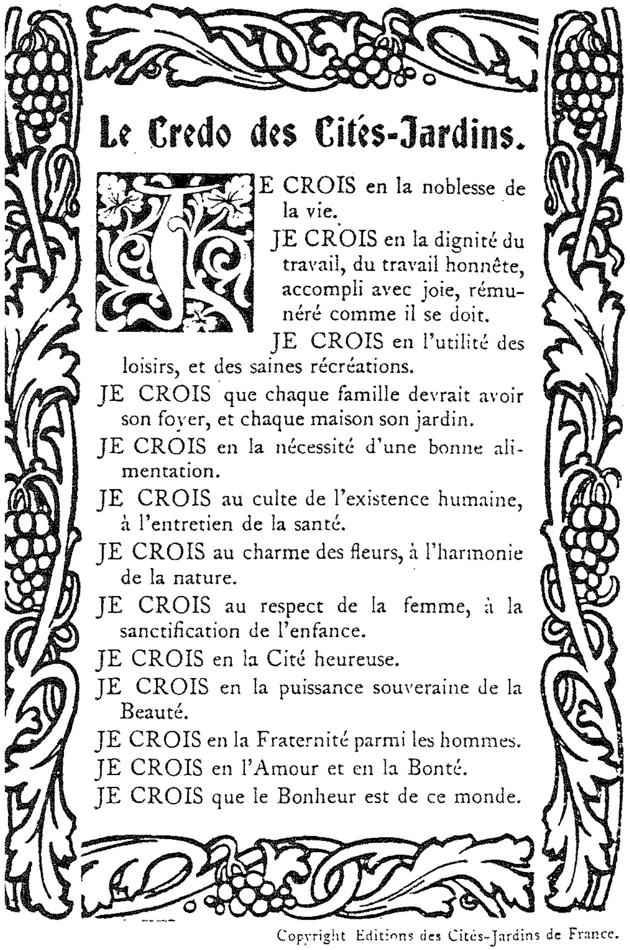
thers in the years ahead – made what was kin to a pilgrimage to Letchworth, to see Ioward's blueprint taking shape on the ground.

Germany, France and Belgium offered parcularly strong links in the early years, with ach of these countries forming its own garden ty organization. For instance, the *Association es Cités-Jardins de France* charged its memers one franc for the benefit of belonging to *ne association d'étude*. In fact, its aims and :tivities went well beyond those of mere study. used propagandist techniques that were very milar to those used by its British counterpart, id, as well as disseminating ideas, held to the actical goal of creating garden cities in France *Association des Cités-Jardins de France* unted). A thirteen-point *credo des cités-jardins* icluded declarations of belief ranging from *la oblesse de la vie* to a commitment that *chaque famille devrait avoir son foyer, et chaque maison son jardin.*

Close contacts were developed between the early organizations, and reciprocal visits, especially between Germany and Britain, became a feature of this period. However, behind the mutual respect of professionals was a lurking fear on both sides that each country was seeking to learn from and outstrip the other country in terms of industrial (and, later, military) supremacy. Garden cities, in offering a healthy environment for their workers, were seen as a key to economic success. 'We must see to it', warned the Chairman of the Garden City Association in 1905 (*Garden City*, 1905) looking to the United States as well as Germany, 'that we are not outstripped by others in the practical application of our own remedy.' He consistently returned to this xenophobic theme, seeking to



Figures 10.8, 10.9, 10.10 and 10.11. Versions of the famous Three Magnets diagram in German, French, Russian and Japanese underline its potency as a diagrammatic representation of Howard's ideas. Compare with the English original (figure 2.2).



Le Credo des Cités-Jardins.

JE CROIS en la noblesse de la vie.

JE CROIS en la dignité du travail, du travail honnête, accompli avec joie, rémunéré comme il se doit.

JE CROIS en l'utilité des loisirs, et des saines récréations.

JE CROIS que chaque famille devrait avoir son foyer, et chaque maison son jardin.

JE CROIS en la nécessité d'une bonne alimentation.

JE CROIS au culte de l'existence humaine, à l'entretien de la santé.

JE CROIS au charme des fleurs, à l'harmonie de la nature.

JE CROIS au respect de la femme, à la sanctification de l'enfance.

JE CROIS en la Cité heureuse.

JE CROIS en la puissance souveraine de la Beauté.

JE CROIS en la Fraternité parmi les hommes.

JE CROIS en l'Amour et en la Bonté.

JE CROIS que le Bonheur est de ce monde.

Figure 10.12. Although Howard's original diagrams were translated, this charming *Credo des Cités Jardins* suggests the vitality of the garden city movement in other countries in developing their own images and devices to put across the message.

rotect the interests of the Empire as a whole s well as the Mother Country. Speaking in 913 (at the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of ıe Association) he admitted that 'glad as I m to see the idea spreading and the efforts ıade to carry it out in other countries, I must ıy with me the Empire stands first. It would e rather a sad thing if England, after having ıved others, herself should be a castaway' (Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, 1913).

Such reservations did not, however, inhibit an active programme of visits by Association officers to those countries that showed an interest in the garden city idea. Some epic journeys were made. In 1913, for instance, Ewart Culpin travelled some 30,000 miles on a lecture tour that took him across the Atlantic and to major

centres and small towns in the United States and Canada. He returned with copies of letters of gratitude from civic leaders, and evidence of new organizations being set up to promote higher standards of town-building. At the same time as Culpin was spreading the message in North America, another pioneer, William Davidge, was hard at work in Australasia, showing lantern slides and speaking to local groups. 'Throughout the whole tour', he was pleased to report, 'the utmost enthusiasm was experienced, and the reports and statements received indicated that a good deal of permanent good work had been done' (GCTPA General Minute Book, 22nd October 1914).

A logical sequence of the lively exchange of ideas and visits between countries in all parts of the world was the formation in 1913 of the International Garden Cities and Town Planning Association. Representatives from Germany, France, Norway, Poland, the United States and Japan came to London to launch the new organization, but it was the British contingent that assumed the key posts. Howard was elected President, Montagu Harris the Chairman, and Culpin the Secretary. The First Congress of the International Association was held in the following year, but delegates barely had time to visit Letchworth and other attractions like Hampstead Garden Suburb before the first rumblings of war put paid for the time being to international collaboration of this sort.

The First World War, though it swept away so much, certainly did not see the demise of this infant body. On the contrary, the idealists who started it could see amidst the ruins an added reason for the protection of international links. As a focus for its concerns in the war years the rebuilding of Belgium became something of a *cause celèbre*. In the wake of so much destruction, there was even talk of building an international garden city on Belgian soil, 'where all the forces of civilisation shall unite in producing a perfect city of health, a city residential, commercial, industrial and agricultural, responding to all the several and varying needs of humanity, preserving the facilities of the city, and above all, serving as a monument and a testimony from humanity the world over to the valour and the honour of Belgium today' (Culpin, 1915, p. 91).

Fittingly, when the war ended, although the idea of an international garden city was not to materialize, the International Association held its first meeting in the country for which it had campaigned so passionately. Delegates made a solemn visit to the battlefields of Western Flanders, before turning their thoughts to the future. The immediate postwar period was a time for looking forward, and enthusiasm for international proposals (like the League of Nations) served indirectly to support the work of those in the garden city movement who were seeking to restore and to strengthen their own links between nations. Annual conferences were held, and although officers from the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association were still to dominate things for some years to come, gradually their influence was lessened. In 1923, the Chairmanship, for the first time, was taken out of British hands, with Montagu Harris giving way to the French garden city pioneer, Henri Sellier.

During the 1930s, the organization (which was by then known as the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning) could not escape the growing turbulence of European politics. Purdom (himself a keen internationalist) observed that 'the Federation passed back into a nominal phase of existence, the Germans secured control, removed the central office to Brussels, but allowed the British to hold presidential and other positions' (Purdom, 1951, p.64). The wave of enthusiasm for international movements that was apparent in the aftermath of the First World War had subsided. Although the case for garden cites was by then well established, in many countries this was becoming less an outcome of the work of the International

Federation and more a product of continuing domestic campaigns.

PRESSING THE CASE

I think it was the persistency with which our group stuck to one objective, and even over-simplified it, that lodged the idea in the political mind. (F. J. Osborn, in a letter to Lewis Mumford, 7th January 1947, in Hughes 1971, p. 145)

At home and abroad, the first quarter century or so of the garden city campaign yielded results. On the positive side, Howard's concept attracted worldwide attention, and there was no shortage of attempts to put ideas into practice. To set against this record, there were, in fact, only two settlements underway which came anywhere near to the essence of Howard's model (namely, Letchworth and Welwyn), with the majority of so-called 'garden city' schemes only loosely related. Most 'garden cities' were really little more than garden suburbs. The more that the original blueprint was mediated through various disciples of the cause, and the more that cultural factors came into play, the greater was the degree of deviation (Hall, 1988).

However, in spite of limited success in direct terms, campaigners remained undaunted, and in Britain the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association emerged from the First World War to launch a vigorous peacetime campaign. Amidst talk of 'homes for heroes' the campaign started well enough, only to waver when the political momentum for greater governmental involvement in housing provision itself slowed in the early 1920s. But certain trends were irreversible (the war had challenged old beliefs and demonstrated the possibilities of a new role for the State) and in housing, as in other areas of social policy, new legislation was gradually introduced.

On the ground, municipal estates in the suburbs, characterized by houses with their own gardens, became a feature of interwar urban change. Although these estates fell a long way short of garden city ideals – significantly, because the new developments were not self-standing settlements – it was generally conceded that at least they contained some of the environmental elements that had been pioneered in settlements like Letchworth. Using the greater powers that had been given to municipalities, there was even hope at one stage of a third garden city, at Wythenshawe, to the south of Manchester (Deakin, 1989). But in spite of the involvement at Wythenshawe of Barry Parker (who with his partner Raymond Unwin, had produced the original Letchworth plan) what transpired was little more than another large estate, with an eventual population of 100,000.

For ten years or so from the middle of the 1920s there is a sense in which the garden city campaign was rather getting left behind by events. No new settlements were in sight, and yet the campaigners persevered with the old message. Even F. J. Osborn (one of the fundamentalists in the movement) warned that the campaign was becoming outdated. Referring to Letchworth and Welwyn, he criticized the movement for 'petting our two ewe lambs with almost indecent fondness, but we show no realization that they are already threatened with old-maidish sterility' (Osborn, 1926, p. 194). Instead, he urged a more aggressive stance, refusing to compromise with 'second best' garden suburb schemes, and reminding the organization that it had a specific propagandist job to do.

Significantly, it was Osborn who from 1936 (when he became Honorary Secretary) led the Association in a new direction. It was not that garden cities as such were abandoned – far from it, for these remained at the heart of it all – but what he did was to advocate a wider strategy of settlement dispersal. What was needed to make real progress, argued Osborn, was a system of national land-use planning. And to achieve that the State had to break with a lingering reliance on the market as an allocative mechanism and, instead, to assume a more

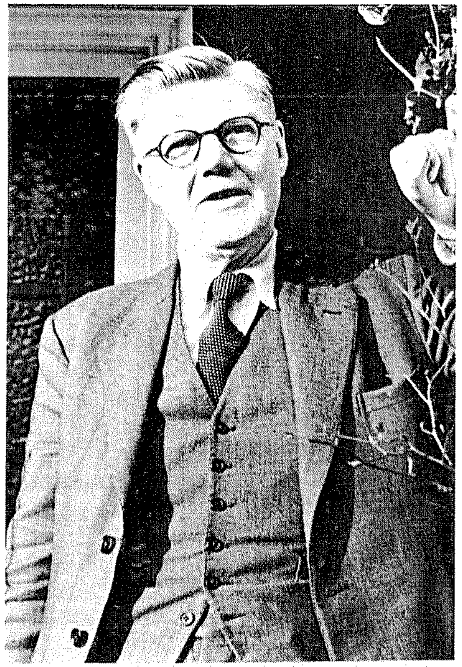


Figure 10.13. Frederic J. Osborn (1885–1978), the propagandist victorious, photographed outside his home at Welwyn Garden City in 1954. He led the garden city movement in Britain during the critical period from the late 1930s to the 1950s.

assertive role. In this way, the seemingly innocuous concept of garden cities was suddenly catapulted into a highly-charged political arena.

A result of this changing emphasis was that the garden city campaign, in the second half of the 1930s, was conducted at two levels. One dimension was that of contributing to a growing groundswell of informed 'middle opinion' that was predisposed towards a greater role for the State. Particularly in the context of a world economic recession and Britain's declining competitive position, the case for policies to achieve industrial restructuring and to cope with the social effects of large-scale unemployment was hard to deny. Politicians from different parties, industrialists and intellectuals joined forces in an influential lobby to change the terms of the political debate as to what should be done. Not everyone was equally enthusiastic about the idea of planning in principle, as, for instance, the young Conservative politician, Harold Macmillan, who admitted: '"Planning" is forced upon us . . . not for idealistic reasons but because the old mechanism which served us when markets were expanding naturally and spontaneously is no longer adequate when the tendency is in the opposite direction' (quoted in Marwick, 1964, p. 287).

The other dimension of the Association's activity was more directly concerned with its immediate priorities, namely, to see the introduction of a comprehensive system of land-use planning and a national commitment to dispersal policies. Opportunities were taken in the early 1930s to make representations to two government committees (Chelmsford and Marley) which each, within their remit to investigate ways of relieving unemployment, considered the building of garden cities. These committees yielded little, however, in contrast to the Royal Commission that was set up in 1937 under the Chairmanship of Sir Montague Barlow. The very brief of the Barlow Committee addressed those issues that were of central concern to the Association, charged as the former was to look at the nation's distribution of population, to consider what disadvantages accrued from the then concentration of industry and people, and to see what might be done to alleviate the situation. Various individuals and organizations were asked to give evidence, and for the Association Osborn wrote and presented a powerful case in favour of planning. His submission extended over forty-three pages, and its contents marked the break with the earlier phase of the Association's campaign – acknowledging a vital role for the State and calling for a strong planning framework as a basis for new policies. Amongst the recommendations was

Figure 10.14. One of Osborn's main achievements was to broaden the garden city campaign making it into an argument for comprehensive planning. The plight of the depressed 'Special Areas' in the 1930s was a particular focus of propagandist concern, comparable with developments in the USA in the same period (see, for example figures 8.3–8.5).

. proposal for a central body to be established, s part of the national planning framework, with esponsibility for building garden cities and atellite towns, and for the development of xisting small towns (Garden Cities and Town 'lanning Association, 1938).

By the time that the Barlow Report was ublished, the context had radically changed. ritain was already into the first year of the econd World War, and it was no longer unmployment and congestion that commanded nmediate attention, so much as survival and ioughts of what might be done when peace eturned. At an earlier stage than in the First Vorld War, largely because of the blitz in 1940–1, reconstruction became a political issue and ie prospect of planning on a national scale was o longer hypothetical. Barlow's own recomiendations contributed to this debate, at least o the extent of giving a further boost to the lea of national planning machinery. Subsequent reports on land utilization and the countryde (Scott Report 1942) and on land values (Uthwatt Report 1941 and 1942) completed a trio of wartime reports that laid a philosophical and practical foundation for legislation to come.

For the garden city campaign these years marked a watershed; if it were to miss the opportunity to go forward then it could easily slip back into the realms of history, but if the moment could be seized much that it sought was within reach. Osborn worked overtime to make sure that the opportunity was not lost. Reflecting the direction in which the campaign was already moving, in 1941 he secured a name change for the organization to that of the Town and Country Planning Association. One reason for this, he argued, was that the term 'garden cities' in the title created the wrong impression. For all the virtues in the concept, garden cities were too often associated in people's minds with 'bad speculative building, and with cranks, sandals, "long-hair", etc.' (persisting images engendered in the pioneering days of Letchworth). It was thought that amongst two groups in particular (intellectuals who were drawn to the idea of planning, but not necessarily to garden cities; and countryside preservationists who confused garden cities with indiscriminate sprawl) the terminology was particularly damaging to the campaign (Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, 1941).

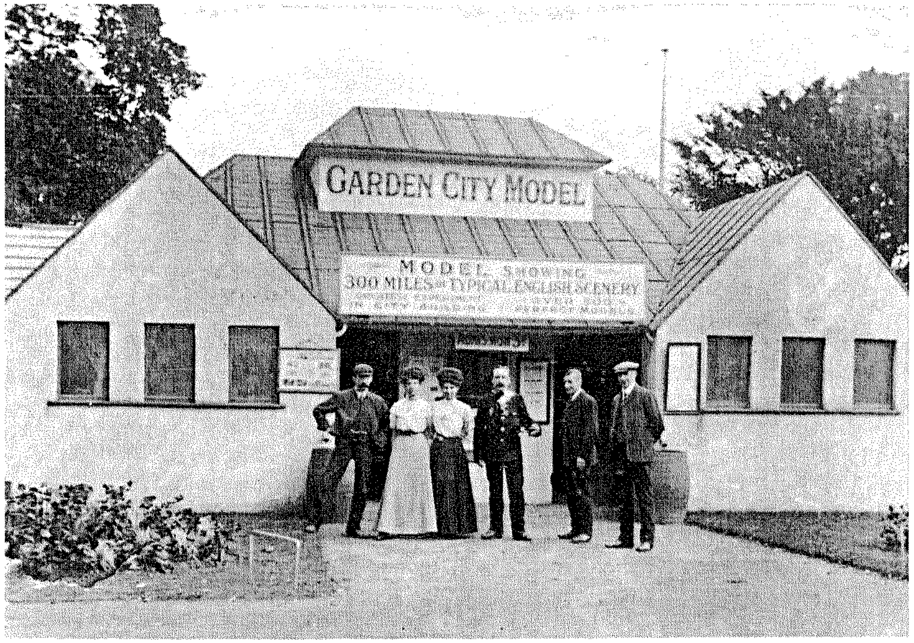
The winning of public opinion was an important part of Osborn's wartime efforts, and he, especially, worked tirelessly to persuade all who would listen to him (including through radio broadcasts to reach the whole nation) that the proper way to rebuild after the war was through a planned process of dispersal. Britain's big cities needed to be 'thinned out' in favour of new, decentralized settlements beyond a green belt. This model of dispersal was, in fact, most clearly expressed in Patrick Abercrombie's 1944 Greater London Plan – something that was by no means coincidental in that Abercrombie had been a member of the Barlow Commission and had been lobbied incessantly by Osborn.

If the ground was well-prepared, in terms of shaping opinion, it was the end of the war and the election of the first majority Labour Government which finally saw planning (other than as an emergency wartime measure) emerge from the drawing board and into the statute books. Various measures were of importance to the Association, each a component in a new system, but none was more closely identified with the garden city campaign than moves towards legislation for a national programme of new towns.

Just a few months after taking office, the Minister of Town and Country Planning, Lewis Silkin, established a departmental committee under the chairmanship of Lord Reith to prepare the ground for a new towns initiative. In August 1946, less than ten months after the committee was formed, legislation was passed in the form of the New Towns Act. The speed of the process and the absence of political opposition tells a story in itself, for the Act was, potentially, a highly contentious measure involving a degree of State intervention which would previously have been regarded as untenable. Although the explanation for this rapid acceptance is complex, the Association could rightly claim some credit for its own part, working over a long period to persuade others of the basic sense and humanity in creating new settlements and reducing congestion in the conurbations. Osborn was not unjustified in making the qualified comment that the commitment to new towns 'certainly looks like some success for the TCP Association's campaign . . .' (in a letter to Lewis Mumford, 21st October 1945, in Hughes, 1971, p. 106).

Regardless of where credit should be attributed, empirically, the 1946 Act can be seen to mark the culmination of a long campaign that started with the publication of Howard's book nearly half a century before. It was not that garden cities, as such, were now to be built (for some important compromises were made along the way, and it was the concept as well as the name that was changed) but the idea of planned decentralization was at last accepted as official policy. Thereafter, the nature of the garden city campaign could never be the same again.

It was Lewis Silkin, the Minister responsible for the new measure, who most pertinently described the change of direction that had become inevitable. In the past, he observed, the Association had concentrated on propaganda, but it was no longer necessary to preach for remedies that had now been adopted. Instead, the Association could acknowledge 'the triumph of passing from the propaganda stage to the stage of action' (Town and Country Planning Association, 1946). As events have since shown, propaganda would continue to be an important part of the Association's activities in the years ahead (more, in fact, than Silkin appears to have envisaged) but so, too, would a close involvement in some of the practical details of new town building. Osborn's 'real anxiety as to what the new towns will be like' (in a letter to Lewis Mumford, 20th August 1946, in Hughes, 1971, p. 129) is a key to the new agenda.



gure 10.15. Photographed c.1911, this shows one of the many ways in which the message of the garden city was read. What happened to the model is not known.

'AYS AND MEANS

ıings like the TCPA do have some running effect ı the national situation . . . (F. J. Osborn, in a letr to Lewis Mumford, 6th March 1949, in Hughes, '71, p. 173).

he passing of the New Towns Act by no means arks the end of the garden city campaign, but e history of the period up to 1946 is, if only an episode, revealing in terms of the workgs of a pressure group. In a book which reews the garden city concept it is salutary to flect on the role of the one body which de›ted itself wholly to Howard's agenda. One ight speculate as to whether, without a conrted campaign, the garden city idea might ıve remained just another late-Victorian fansy. Would the force of the idea have been enough, or was the role of the Garden City Association (and its successors) decisive in promoting it onto a world stage? While these are impossible questions to answer, it is gainful (if only because of lessons that might be passed on to environmental pressure groups now) to consider some of the 'pros' and 'cons' surrounding this campaign.

In some respects, as a model for effective action, the Association was exemplary. For a start, it proved responsive to new sources of propaganda as they became available, and, in general, used these to good effect. At the time of its inception, the range of propagandist techniques was relatively limited. Howard's book provided the basic way of disseminating information, with good use made of reviews in a wide range of publications. Thereafter, the

archives reveal lengthy, handwritten letters as existing and new contacts were explored, along with the circulation of fresh tracts to spread the gospel. Perhaps most characteristic of early campaigning was the use of the public lecture, in an age when knowledge was imparted and received with an assurance that has since disappeared.

The garden city campaign (although maligned in some quarters) was also adept at securing a wide press coverage, including through the newspapers of one of its important benefactor families, the Harmsworths. Exhibitions and conferences also played a part throughout the campaign, including a prominent place in the *Daily Mail* Ideal Home Exhibition which got underway as a popular annual event in the 1920s. From an initial set of lantern slides, the Association progressed to the use of occasional films, and to radio broadcasting. In many ways, though, the most effective means of promoting its cause was through 'behind the scenes' lobbying and through the incorporation of 'the great and the good' into honorary positions within the Association.

Another measure of effectiveness is that (although sometimes it was rather slower than it might have been) it proved to be remarkably adaptable in redefining its aims to meet new sets of circumstances. From its closely circumscribed origins – with only the spread of Howard's ideas and the start of a practical project on the agenda – it was to make a number of significant modifications. Once Letchworth was underway, for instance, the garden city campaign assumed a wider role on the town planning stage. As a source of influence on early twentieth-century planning philosophy and on the leading professionals of the day it is difficult to underestimate the importance of the campaign.

The effectiveness of the campaign was also enhanced by the national reputations enjoyed by a succession of influential leaders. Howard was himself a person of ideas and a persuasive speaker, but not particularly notable as a practical leader of the campaign. In the early stages, it was left to others like Thomas Adams to create an effective organization; to Ralph Neville to spread the word amongst people of influence; and to Ewart Culpin to broaden the scope of the campaign. Later, the stage was dominated by F. J. Osborn, who served his apprenticeship through residency at both Letchworth and Welwyn in their formative years, before going on to orchestrate an enormously influential campaign at what proved to be a time of great opportunity. Osborn's role remains to this day a fascinating model of pressure group leadership.

If the above factors offer positive evidence to support the argument that the Association played a decisive role in ensuring the spread of the garden city idea, there is also another side to the story. Effective though the Association was in some respects, in others it fell short of its own targets. It has, for instance, never been able to achieve a large membership total (its peak of a little over 2500 dates back to the start of the century and the interest surrounding the formation of Letchworth); its finances have invariably been slender, and on occasions the very future of the organization has been brought into question on this issue. Moreover, while it has been able to enjoy the benefit of leaders who have been pioneers in modern planning, there have also been times (for much of the 1920s, for instance) when the ship has been rudderless.

The main reservation that one can note from observing the campaign has, however, little to do with failings within the organization itself and more to do with the context in which the campaign was conducted. In this sense, it remains questionable as to how much a pressure group is really able to influence policy; or, in this case, the extent to which the campaigning of the Association finally forced the State to respond with an official programme of new settlements. Pressure group theory rests firmly within a pluralist mould, with assumptions that political power is accessible and that decisions can be influenced by rational argument. The whole rationale for the garden city campaign was consistent with that belief, and the opening words of Howard's 1898 credo point unequivocally to the potential of persuading others from across the political spectrum: '. . . a single question having a vital bearing upon national ife and well-being on which all persons, no natter of what political party, or what shade of political opinion, would be found to fully and entirely agreed' (Howard, in 1946 edition, p. 41).

The garden city campaign was nothing if not consistent in its attempt to persuade others of he worth of its ideas, and it was by no means vithout influence. At the same time, it is apparent that those periods when it was most effective coincided with certain events of national and international import. A background of political concern over national efficiency in he Edwardian era, the economic crisis of the 930s, and two world wars each provided a timulus to thoughts about resettlement and econstruction. Most significantly, the 1946 Act vas itself conceived and enacted in the context of a portfolio of radical reforms that were inroduced at the end of the Second World War. The garden city campaigners had played their part in implanting the idea of new settlements, ut in the end there were compelling reasons f a structural nature that help to account for he ease with which the Act was passed. Quite imply, the economic viability of postwar Britin required the renewal of much of the infratructure, including housing and industrial plant, nd new towns offered unprecedented oppornities towards this end.

The point made is that, no matter how effective the campaign of a pressure group, in he last resort it has to be assessed in the light f broader socio-economic considerations as vell. In shedding light on the work of environmental pressure groups in general, what the arden city campaign reveals is that the work of campaigners is important – in getting issues on the political agenda, and in sowing seeds for future action. At the same time, the evidence suggests that this work alone does not provide the whole explanation, and that structural factors also have to be taken into account. Garden cities, it might be concluded, have to be seen as a part of rather than apart from broader currents of twentieth-century history.

POSTSCRIPT: GARDEN CITIES OF TOMORROW?

> The garden city . . . is the most sensible, practical, well-tried, environmentally sound, socially beneficial, economic and flexible device available for the creation of good urban environments. Having neglected and under-used it for too long, let us now have the commitment and vision to apply it to everyone's benefit. (David Hall, in RTPI/TCPA, 1989, p. 13)

In the last decade of the twentieth century, the garden city is recalled not as a period piece but as a robust concept that might still have its day. No-one could seriously claim that Howard's blueprint is still valid in its entirety, but the essence of his proposals retains an enduring lure. Settlements of a manageable size with a sense of identity, the provision of a good living and working environment, and a way of dealing with escalating land values and of securing benefits for the whole community remain attractive goals.

In some respects the applicability of the garden city idea is greater now than it was nearly a century ago. Not only are there still basic housing and community needs to be met, but in the last decade of the second millennium attention is becoming more focused on environmental and quality of life issues. This concern is expressed most completely in the modern environmental concept of 'sustainable development', defined in the 1987 Brundtland Report as development that meets the needs of the present without weakening the abilities of future generations to meet their own needs. The

terminology certainly differs from Howard's but such modern environmental concerns encompass the very same notions of balance and harmony which were central to his concept of the social city.

However, it is clear that many environmentalists see the garden city idea as an unsustainable form of development best avoided in the environmentally conscious 1990s. There have been important direct or implied criticisms of the garden city tradition on environmental grounds. Thus the European Commission's 1990 Green Paper on the Urban Environment offers implicit condemnation by strongly pressing the case for compact big cities and criticizing the notion of peripheral development (which would appear to include garden cities) on environmental and social grounds. More recently Friends of the Earth and the Policy Studies Institute (Elkin, McLaren and Hillman, 1991) have been forthright in their condemnation of the perceived wastefulness of garden city development and have argued for the maintenance of high densities in existing cities.

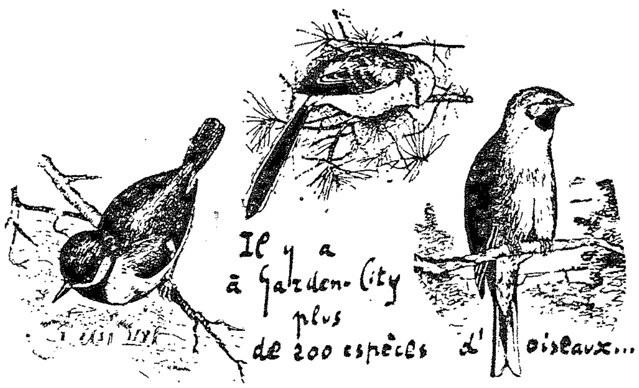
There is a depressingly familiar ring about these kinds of criticism, which involve either a lack of knowledge or misunderstanding of what the garden city ideal represents (Lock, 1991). The Green Paper for example equates peripheral development with poorly serviced dormitory housing estates which are the complete antithesis of what the garden city movement has sought. It also criticizes the excessive functional segregation of different land uses which, it claims, the garden city movement bequeathed to modern town planning. While the movement certainly popularized (though did not invent) zoning, the critical point is that garden city planning has always sought to ensure that housing, employment and services were developed separately but in reasonable proximity to each other, to reduce rather than increase the need for energy-expensive movement. Nor is it at all clear how the compact cities advocated by both organizations will be able to cope with existing and future housing needs. Both reports, especially that by the FOE and PSI, exhibit a belief in the perfectibility of high-density living which is at least questionable given recent experiences.

In fact no definitive research results yet exist which enable any convincing evaluation of the environmental sustainability of compact big cities versus decentralized social cities. However the garden city's environmental credentials appear at least as impressive as its rival. The garden city movement's traditional concerns to promote rural protection, to create compact and efficient smaller urban forms within defined boundaries as an alternative to suburban sprawl, to minimize commuting and even to promote gardening remain impressively 'green' goals. Recently the movement has begun to encourage self-build projects, most notably at Lightmoor in Telford New Town, and actively embrace other aspects of the emergent environmental agenda.

More importantly the notion of sustainable development itself is also limited by its lack of emphasis on the social dimensions of urban policy, a theme which has always figured strongly in the garden city tradition. Thus the pursuit of an allegedly sustainable goal of big city urbanity to the exclusion of any other metropolitan strategies must inevitably offer least to the less well off because they will suffer most in the increased competition for limited urban space. Of course the less well off have also gained least through the presently dominant pattern of urban change, metropolitan decentralization, where this has been a market-led process shaped by demand rather than need.

As has been noted earlier in this book, such a model has reached its most complete expression in the United States. Schaffer and Fishman both show how the absence of any government commitment to a new communities decentralist strategy for metropolitan areas has reinforced the immense social and spatial polarization of American society. The poor are imprisoned in

Figures 10.16 and 10.17. The propaganda and imagery of the movement has relied greatly on celebrating nature, for example in the famous banner produced in Letchworth for the 1911 Coronation (figure 10.16).



But there has been remarkably little serious scientific discussion of the ecological strengths of the garden city; Benoît-Lévy was unusual in highlighting this aspect (figure 10.17). We may expect rather more of this as green issues become more prominent in the late twentieth century.

the metropolitan core areas (inner-city regeneration notwithstanding); the outer city and surrounding countryside are increasingly reserves for the better off. By contrast the limited implementation of a garden city-inspired planned decentralization in Britain has, as a matter of measurable fact, offered absolute and relative social betterment to certain sections of the working class. That such betterment remains woefully incomplete cannot negate what has been achieved and is certainly not an argument for allegedly sustainable compact cities which are unlikely to bring any equivalent social gains.

Howard clearly understood that concern for nature could not involve any rejection of humanity; rather it was to be a harmonious reconciliation of environmental and social needs. His deceptively simple yet profound understanding of this ideal and its practical reiteration and development within the garden city movement sends a potent message to the environmentalists of the 1990s, who have not yet perhaps fully appreciated this simple truth. Quite simply no environmental strategies can be sustainable in the long term if they involve locking the poor and disadvantaged into their existing or worse conditions, by refusing to countenance the development by which they can better themselves. The challenge is to meet human needs in ways that protect and enhance the environment.

But we must readily concede that the environmentalists, at least those who have been dominating recent discussions, have not so far chosen to accept these pro-garden city arguments. How realistic then are the optimistic words with which this book opened? The Town and Country Planning Association continues to preach the Howardian gospel, though given its historic role as the guardian of the garden city faith this may not itself be particularly significant. However, even the most jaundiced observer must concede that such propagandizing has carried a good deal more conviction in recent years. In Britain certainly the welter of private proposals for new settlements has been the most positive signal of a revived interest, as Michael Hebbert has shown. But recession in the development industry and an extremely restrictive planning system have so far prevented the most garden city-like of these from realization. This may well change, particularly if local planning authorities more fully embrace such proposals through the plan-making process, rather than simply reacting to developer pressures. An upturn in the housing market will also reactivate many of the pro-new settlement arguments of the late 1980s.

The 1990s may also see some revival of strategic regional planning, which has lain inert in the iron lung of Thatcherism during the 1980s. On the whole this bodes well for new settlement proposals as the recent calls for an East Thames corridor of urbanization to capitalize on the new Channel Tunnel rail links suggest. Authored by Peter Hall, an influential though flexible advocate of Howardian social cities, the scheme is for a 'Thames-la-Vallée' linear new town on the model of Marne-la-Vallée, the eastern Parisian new town which is poised to achieve international prominence as the location of the recently-opened EuroDisneyland.

As these French developments imply the expansion of the Parisian new towns continues, though as in Britain the dominant policy emphasis has tended to shift into the regeneration of existing urban core areas. However French intellectual and professional interest in the garden city tradition is certainly buoyant as the cité jardins discussed by Jean-Pierre Gaudin have been rediscovered. Elsewhere in Europe the regular appearance of garden city-like new settlement proposals suggests that the tradition is alive and well. In the former Soviet Union particularly, the end of communism seems to have triggered a real revival of interest in the garden city tradition in several of the former republics (see, for example, Hall, 1991, p. 323).

The signs then are hopeful but tentative. In circumstances of recurrent international recession, new settlement proposals obviously appear less viable than the limited-growth compact city model currently favoured on environmental grounds or the incremental peripheral expansion model in which such growth as occurs can be pragmatically tacked on to existing settlements without incurring massive front end infrastructure costs. It is certainly possible though that in individual countries the latter situation might be nudged into something closer to the social city model. Britain, the home of the garden city idea, is currently closest to this position. However the wider context may change, which would certainly introduce new options.

The world in the 1990s is presented with unprecedented options for change, far more fundamental than mere national or local readjustments of planning or urban design. The collapse of communism makes possible but does not guarantee an unprecedented era of peace and (sustainable) prosperity. Much depends on the size and mode of disposal of the peace dividends, and on the commitment and courage of political leaders in constructing a new democratic world order that incorporates both developing and developed countries. If such a change does occur we are likely to see real and widespread economic growth and associated social demands that will necessitate new strategies of planned urban growth that must incorporate garden city thinking if they are to be sustainable. The signs so far are not optimistic, but it is a challenge that Ebenezer Howard, great internationalist that he was, might well have relished.

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