

Garden Cities in Denmark & Europe

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Through our authors' analyses we intend that the Perspectives series helps to promote knowledge, increase understanding, generate conversations - and at times perhaps challenge assumptions - about what Garden Cities are or might be. We want to make clear that the views of authors in this series are solely their own and do not represent any official policy position of either the IGCI or its host organisations.

We hope you find this paper informative, stimulating, thought provoking and useful.

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Garden Cities between International and National Agendas. A Comparative Research upon Garden Cities and Suburbs in Denmark, England and Germany

Abstract

The Perspectives Paper presents a comparative study of garden cities in Denmark, England and Germany. First, the concept of the garden city's introduction and development in Denmark is reviewed, from the pre-Howardian workers' associations to the height of the garden city's popularity from 1910 to 1925, where both cooperative societies, housing companies, municipalities, industries and private owners built garden cities. Next, a comparison is made with England and Germany, where the Perspectives Paper partly maps some of the inspirations behind the Danish garden cities, and partly illustrates the extent to which the English garden city concept in both Denmark and Germany was merged into national, social and political agendas, as well as cultural and architectural traditions and assessments. The conclusion is that there was no simple transfer of the English garden city. So more to the point they could be termed "German garden cities", "Danish garden cities" etc.¹

The concept of The Garden City and Ebenezer Howard's visions are well-known themes in international town planning history. Less known is that The Garden City also played a role in Scandinavian urban development and town-planning. Until now, a Scandinavian

monograph about garden cities has only been published in Sweden,² and very little has been published in non-Scandinavian languages.

Publications on garden cities can be gathered in two groups: First, the descriptions of garden cities, especially the English, around 1910 which became known throughout Europe.³ And secondly, the series of publishing 1990 ff., as garden cities were re-discovered in the wake of environmental awareness and critics of modernist town-planning. Thus, monographs have been published in England, Germany and other countries,⁴ together with several interesting anthologies.⁵ Nevertheless, the individual articles of these have in particular presented either general ideological and aesthetic issues, or the garden cities of individual countries. As a matter of fact, very few international comparative studies have been carried out – and virtually no analytical studies on the actual gardens of the garden cities.⁶

Topics of research and selection criteria

The main issues of our research were: How did the Danish garden cities compare to the English and German ones? Were the Danish garden cities the outcome of a national context, or just pure transfer of the English model? How was The Garden City received by residents, architects and politicians? How did the horticultural aspects of garden cities compare to the contemporary landscaping agenda? What role did the gardens play for the residents' economies, and how did the relationship between

recreation, ornamentation and utility develop until today? Further: What influence did the garden cities have upon town-planning in the following decades? And last, but not least: Can garden cities inspire us to create better cities in the future?

Since garden cities in Denmark were primarily garden suburbs, a challenge arose in marking the boundary between small garden city-like settlements on one side, and urban areas of detached houses with gardens on the other. The selection criteria, amongst others, were that the settlements should be 1. a joint project with joint facilities, 2. characterized by the planning ideas of the English garden cities, 3. characterized by an overall architectural concept for urbanization and garden culture, and 4. termed "garden city" by the founders

The outcome was 25 residential areas, built from 1898 to approx. 1930. In order to map the possible pathways of inspiration, we investigated the garden cities in England and Germany, too, which were mentioned in Danish literature of the time. In England: Bournville, Port Sunlight, New Earswick, Letchworth, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Welwyn Garden City, and in Germany: Hellerau⁷ and Margarethenhöhe together with a number of garden cities in and around Berlin.⁸ All garden cities were visited, described and photographed together with research on literature and documents in archives and museums, in particular architectural plans and drawings as well as older photographs illustrating changes in

buildings and gardens throughout time. In the majority of the cases, we conducted interviews with inhabitants to assess the present functionality and social environment of the garden cities.

Three countries – three different contexts

In England, the industrial city, with its slums and pollution, created the vision of The Garden City. Howard did not believe in reform of the existing cities; The Garden City should be a new and independent urban development, in line with the English tradition of Utopia. Thus, the Garden City concept in England was closely connected with the idea of town-planning. On the Continent, however, urban sprawl was not the same problem, as cities had been subject to planning, for better or worse, since the 17th and 18th centuries. And while the English bogey was the endless rows of terraced houses, the problem in Continental cities was the huge tenement houses with narrow and dark backyards. Yet, both in England and in Germany a debate grew between the fundamentalists who supported garden cities according to Howard's model, and the pragmatists who agreed that garden cities could also be suburban and industrial developments, as long as they were created in the spirit of The Garden City, i.e. with common ownership and free of land speculation.⁹

In England, garden cities were created in particular by two parts: philanthropic industrialists and the circle of reformers around Howard. Tenant organizations also took part

in the actual construction, while the labour movement remained uninvolved. In Germany and Denmark however, the working class was actively engaged in housing issues. In the wake of Bismarck's Sozialpolitik of the 1880s, a large number of workers' housing associations emerged, and in 1898, Denmark implemented a German inspired law offering financial support for such associations. In the following years, a number of workers' housing associations were established around Copenhagen, building collectively – but with the goal that the individual houses should be privately owned, once the debt was paid off.

The first two phases of garden cities in Denmark

In Germany, the garden city concept got an early breakthrough in 1902 with the foundation of Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft, creating garden cities from 1905-06 and onwards. In Denmark, it took a few more years before the knowledge of the English model spread out. Apart from brief notes, the first articles about English garden cities appeared around 1907-08, and interestingly enough in industry and hygiene journals. Nevertheless, the workers' housing associations built small garden city-like estates with semi-detached houses and front gardens along tree-lined roads with central greens and facilities. However, garden cities had existed in England before Howard – primarily Bournville (1876/1893 ff.) and Port Sunlight (1888 ff.). Especially the latter became known throughout Europe, due to clever marketing.¹⁰

The Danish breakthrough of the Howardian concept came in 1910-12 with articles in the journals of architecture¹¹, the embellishment of Copenhagen¹² and others.¹³ At the same time, the secretary for the National Housing and Planning Council in England, Henry R. Aldridge, held lectures for the Danish architect and engineers associations,¹⁴ and in the same year, the architect Anton Rosen, city engineer N. H. Blicher, Odense, and others undertook study trips to English and German garden cities.

One traveller to England, the solicitor and housing politics activist, N.C. Boldsen published a book about garden homes for people with limited means.¹⁵ Soon after, he and the Labour housing mayor of Copenhagen founded Dansk Haveboligforening, the Danish Garden Housing Association. In its regulations, emphasis was laid on the hygienic and economic benefits of garden cities and the importance of avoiding land speculation.¹⁶ Georgism had come to Denmark. Simultaneously the two garden cities, Grøndalsvænge and Præstevangen in Copenhagen were founded as cooperatives, independent of the new Gardening Association and initiated by people from the Danish Labour and trade unions, actually provoked by the problems for working class families with 'children-unfriendly' landlords and the lack of gardens for self-sufficiency.

The architecture of the European garden cities was characterized by a common revival of pre-industrial traditions, such as the English Arts and Crafts and the German

Heimatschutz architecture. In Denmark, the garden cities became the focal point for the development of Danish vernacular style, too, organized by Bedre Byggeskik, the Association for 'Better Building'.¹⁷ And like the Letchworth and Hüllerau experiments with cheap houses, Grøndalsvænge and Præstevangen were crucial in the development of the small Danish house – as expressed by the architects Poul Holsøe and Jesper Tvede, "houses that workers and officers can live in ... ordinary, regular houses, as we recognize from the countryside ... like our parents' homes. We cannot build beautiful villas with towers and spikes and expensive decorations – no, we want even houses with distinct lines, fitting well into the Danish landscape."¹⁸

While the workers' associations settlements were characterized by order and conformity, Grøndalsvænge and Præstevangen were laid out with greens, pathways and winding roads – and just like in England and Germany, exemptions were sought from the bye-laws to lay out narrow roads and footpaths. In addition, Poul Holsøe also produced a series of drawings for decorative gazebos and poultry houses, while architectural garden plans were rare.¹⁹

New actors on the garden city scene

In 1912 too, the first social housing associations were established, but preferred, however, to build flats, often in the form of 'workmen's castles' or large-scale blocks. But unlike Germany, the state

and local municipalities did not engage in housing issues. This changed however, during the First World War, where Denmark suffered the consequences of stalled construction. In 1916-17, the first Danish legislation on state-funding for housing was implemented, and at the same time several municipalities, both social democratic and conservative, built public housing, sometime taking on the form of garden cities. On some occasions, even social housing associations built garden cities. Particularly interesting is Studiebyen – 'The Study Town' in Hellerup, north of Copenhagen, built by KAB, a housing association founded by F.C. Boldsen in 1920, with the aim of developing new housing forms and techniques. 'The Study Town' is a typical garden city with a gate house, small squares and blind roads. A number of leading Danish architects were asked to design model houses, and landscape architect C.N. Brandt was asked to develop garden layouts, with space for both ornamental and kitchen gardens.

Unlike English and German companies, Danish companies rarely built homes for their employees, mainly due to Danish industry being based in cities – with one exception: the shipyards founded after the First World War. Located in small ports, they competed for labour, and in some places built garden cities to attract workers. Thus, Danish garden cities were mostly collective projects. Only in Odense in Funen, garden cities became private initiatives. Here, Anton Rosen and a local market gardener took interest

in garden cities and joined on a journey to England and Germany. Subsequently, Rosen planned the garden city of Gerthasminde, and designed a number of large houses, arranged as picturesque semi-detached or grouped houses, including a 'gate' with archways, clearly influenced by English and German models with half-timbering, gables and bay windows. After a break 1914-18, construction continued in the form of terraced houses, but consequently stopped.

Two other garden cities in Odense, planned by Rosen, also remained unfinished. The houses in the Odense garden cities were built for private buyers, but despite the wishes of Rosen to create 'a peaceful and beautiful neighbourhood' with 'solid and healthy housing', the garden city concept clashed with Danish values.²⁰ As Poul Holsøe suggested, the ideal home of many Danes was an individual villa. In England, semi-detached houses and front gardens were perceived as a step forward, compared to terraced housing, whereas semi-detached houses in Denmark were perceived as going down in the world.

Yet, like in England the garden city also became a catalyst for Danish town-planning. The idea of town-planning emerged from a concern on the new sprawling 'station towns' in the countryside. Subsequently a circle of experts from Bedre Byggeskik established the Danish Town Planning Laboratory in 1921, and in 1925 Denmark gained its first town planning law. Consequently, Denmark, like most of the Continent, changed

its agenda during the 1920s from garden cities to town-planning and large-scale housing schemes. Nevertheless, the garden city concept had repeated come-backs in Danish urban building. Namely, in the years immediately after 1945, there was an interest in 'humanistic' town planning and 'community' development, creating several garden city-like estates. And from the late 1970s, the criticism of modernist cities fuelled a new wave of 'tight-and-low' 'building.

During the 1920s and 30s, many Danish garden cities were sold off to private ownership. An exception is Grøndalsvænge, which has stayed as a cooperative to the present day. Especially around Copenhagen, by virtue of their environment, the garden cities have become attractive, gentrified residential areas, whilst some of the provincial garden cities have experienced more residential continuity. Despite this, most garden cities have managed to retain a sense of community, maintaining much of the original common life. New generations are aware of their unique heritage and character, and preservation orders have been passed for most garden cities, which have also, in recent years, had works published for their 100th anniversary celebrations.

The gardens of the garden cities

As mentioned, the gardens of the garden cities have been subject of astonishingly little research. One reason may be that Ebenezer Howard did not initially define The Garden City as a house-cum-

garden city. His vision was that residents should not 'sweat' to produce vegetables and fruit in their own gardens; they should rest when getting home from work. The Garden City, according to Howard, should be supplied with agricultural and garden products from the surrounding countryside. The Garden City vision was rather one of 'a city in the garden' i.e. in the open country, or a city 'like a garden' i.e. a green and healthy city, perhaps inspired by Chicago, that since the 1860s was called 'The Garden City' because of its many parks.

Thus, an important aspect of the English garden cities was the green impression and the integration of the existing landscape. Yet, the English working classes had no tradition of gardening, as they had lived in industrial suburbs and mining towns for too long. Therefore, the English garden cities had limited areas for kitchen gardens, with the exception of Bournville. In Port Sunlight there were just backyards behind the houses, with allotments available for those interested. However, during the two world wars a need of self-sufficiency reigned under the slogan of "Dig on for Victory". But it was short-lived, and today the gardens of the English garden cities are not characterized by any particular interest in cultivation.

Unlike England, the Danish and German working classes had active gardening traditions, as many were first or second generation town dwellers, or already had allotments. German gardening theorist, Leberecht Migge, emphasized that gardens were just as important as

houses for the quality of working class life, and subsequently most German garden cities incorporated spacious kitchen gardens.²¹ Until today, the gardens of the German garden cities have been used intensely, reflecting both the legacy of allotments and the recent interest in organic foods and self-sufficiency. In Denmark, garden cities competed with other possibilities for small-scale gardening, such as allotments and larger family sized allotments.²²

Thus, houses and gardens were two sides of the same working class culture with its dreams of fresh air and own soil, and, above all, the need for own garden produce. By means of aesthetic housing and well-kept surroundings, they could demonstrate equality and respectability to the middle-class, too. Yet, they always worried that the garden city dwellings could be perceived as 'huts' and that the gardens would resemble unkempt allotments. Therefore, in many garden cities, there were rules for the appearance of the front gardens, and garden committees made sure that the overall image looked decent and well-kept. Thus, the self-discipline of the residents paralleled the architects and landscape gardeners efforts to unite conservative ideals with new conceptions of beauty and harmony.

Since the beginnings, Danish garden cities have to some extent followed the mainstream of garden culture towards a more recreational use.²³ However, after a period in the 1960s, where the inhabitants tried to get rid of hedges, fences and road-side trees, efforts have been made to recreate the original and

distinctive green townscape. Road-side trees have been re-planted, and traditional fences, hedges and gates are being re-established after old drawings. The gardens are also, at present, characterized by children and the growing trend of urban gardening with raised vegetable beds and small farm animals.

Summary:

Differences and similarities between Denmark, England and Germany

As part of the European Reform Movement, the garden cities should be alternatives to the congested English industrial towns as well as the continental tenement blocks. At the same time, they expressed a desire to create 'Gesamtkunstwerke' of town-planning, architecture and garden culture, restoring the qualities of pre-industrial villages and towns, and separating the garden cities from the outer world by 'gates' and 'walls'. Thus, the garden cities acted as spearheads for the renaissance of vernacular traditions together with the development of new housing forms.

The English garden cities were executed in particular by philanthropic manufacturers and idealistic social pioneers, whilst the German garden cities were built both by industrialists, private companies and public authorities. In Denmark, garden cities were exceptional in that they were largely a working class project. However, it was only a small working class 'elite' had the economic surplus to engage itself in real estate – and

the courage to take the social risks associated with unconventional housing. In a society with extremely subtle class differences, many were afraid that semi-detached and terraced housing could be perceived as low-status estates. As mentioned, the middle-class of Odense was less willing to take such a risk than the working class of Copenhagen.

An interesting point is that the pre-Howard English garden cities like Bournville and Port Sunlight had a great influence on the elaboration of the early garden cities of the Continent. In Denmark in particular, a generation of garden cities sprouted up from 1898, obviously inspired from England, but at a time when Howard's ideas had not yet reached Denmark. English books and articles illustrating the first stages of Letchworth, New Earswick and Hampstead Garden Suburb, also meant, that in both Denmark and Germany 'garden cities' were considered as picturesque villages with vernacular architecture, strengthened by the influence of Camillo Sitte and his thoughts on 'the picturesque town'.²⁴ The large spaces, the boulevards and central squares of the English garden cities (created as a contrast to the messy old towns), were less known and imitated on the Continent, where garden cities were usually of a smaller size.

Unlike Britain and Ireland, where the garden city concept influenced ordinary town-planning until post-war New Towns,²⁵ the garden cities of Denmark and Germany only gained a limited popularity and influence, due to both economic and cultural barriers. The majority of the

population had already developed other ideals for housing; in Germany apartments in large town properties, in Denmark detached 'villas' with bays and spires. Thus, the garden cities of Denmark and Germany became enclaves, and in both countries the agenda changed after the First World War to large-scale town-planning and housing, with modernism rejecting garden cities as 'romantic', 'reactionary' and unable to solve the housing needs of the masses.

Thus, a common definition of the European garden city is not possible. The garden cities of Germany and Denmark were not just a matter of simple transfer of the English models. In each country, garden cities were a result of the interaction between, on one hand the inspiration from early garden cities as well as Ebenezer Howard garden cities, on the other hand national traditions, social and political issues and cultural preferences. In this way, it makes sense to talk about the garden city of Denmark, the garden city of Germany, etc.

However, the many common attributes and values make garden cities recognizable, wherever you go in Europe. Lately, garden cities have gained interest, too, as a possible model for future cities. As Thomas Will expresses it, the garden city presents a more sustainable, contained urban community which, with its respect for history and tradition, shows an alternative to the eternal cultivation of the 'new'.²⁶ So, there has been a new interest in Germany in building Gartenstädte – and in England, The Bournville

Trust has started building a new garden city. Also in Denmark, there is a renewed interest in building on a more human scale; among others, the famous Copenhagen "Potato Rows" have been described and imitated,²⁷ whilst the concept of the garden city have, until now, been unknown.

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Ill. 1. The 'White City' founded 1898 by the gas workers at Frederiksberg near Copenhagen. The concept of the workers' housing associations came from Germany, but the lay-out with semi-detached houses and front gardens would have been unthinkable without the knowledge of Port Sunlight and Bournville. Helle Ravn/ Peter Dragsbo, 2016.

Endnotes

- ¹ Published as Ravn and Dragsbo, Havebyen.
- ² Rådberg, Den svenska trädgårdsstaden.
- ³ Particularly works like: William Alexander Harvey, The Model Village and its Cottages, London: B.T. Batsford,1906; John Sutton Nettelfold. Practical Housing. Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1908; Raymond Unwin. Town Planning in Practice, London: T. Fisher Unwin,1909/ 1910; Charles B. Purdom: The Garden City, London: Temple Press,1908/1913 and Mackay Hugh Baillie Scott (ed.). Garden Suburbs. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910, together with articles in the internationally known periodical The Studio (1893-1964).
- ⁴ E. g. Miller. English Garden Cities, and Schollmeier, Gartenstädte in Deutschland.
- ⁵ Bollerey, Fehl and Hartmann, Im Grünen wohnen, Ward,The Garden City, and Will and Lindner, Gartenstadt.
- ⁶ One exception is: Erika Schmidt in: Gartenstadt, 72-83.
- ⁷ See a.o. Schinker. Die Gartenstadt Hellerau, and Becker-Kilian, Hellerau.
- ⁸ Based upon Wolff. Gartenstädte in und um Berlin.
- ⁹ Very clearly stated in Kampffmeyer, Die deutsche Gartenstadtbewegung, 5-8
- ¹⁰ Hubbard and Shipperbottom. A Guide to Port Sunlight Village.
- ¹¹ Johanne Gregersen: "Havebyerne i udlandet" [Foreign garden cities]. In: Architekten XIII: 1910-11, 418-20 and: Holger Rasmussen. "Moderne Byplanlægning og Boligreform i England" [Modern town-planning and housing reform in England]. In: Architekten XIV: 1911-12, 161-74.
- ¹² Vilhelm Lorenzen. "Engelske havebyer". In: Forskønnelsen, 1911. 113-20.
- ¹³ E.g. A. Bjerre. "Havebyen ude og hjemme" [The garden city – abroad and home]. In: Gads Danske Magasin, dec. 1910, 255-64
- ¹⁴ Henry R. Aldridge: "Foredrag om Boligspørgsmaalet, holdt 10. Maj 1912 [Lecture on the Housing Question, 12th of May, 1912]. In: Architekten, XIV: 1911-12, 357-64, 375-81 and 389-95.
- ¹⁵ Boldsen, Haveboliger i Danmark.
- ¹⁶ Copenhagen City Archives, Mallings Collection. "Haveby"and "Dansk Haveboligforening". KBF 4335.
- ¹⁷ Founded 1915.
- ¹⁸ Quot. from Præstevangen, undated (ca. 1912).
- ¹⁹ Royal Danish Library, Danish Art Library. The Collection of Architectural Drawings. Poul Holsøe: Grøndalsvænge.
- ²⁰ Anton Rosen: "A/S Aaalækkegaards Jorder og Bagegaards Jorder". In: Architekten, 51: 1917, 441-44.
- ²¹ Migge, Die Gartenkultur des 20. Jahrhunderts.
- ²² Dragsbo, Hvem opfandt parcelhuskvarteret [Who invented the family size allotments?].
- ²³ Ravn. Gulerødder, græs eller granit [Carrots, grass or granite].
- ²⁴ Sitte. Der Städtebau.
- ²⁵ de Soissons. Welwyn Garden City.
- ²⁶ Will, Gartenstadt, 41 ff.
- ²⁷ Bech-Danielsen and Stender, Et lille hus I byen.

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