Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City Idea and the Ideology of Industrialism
La Cité-jardin d’Ebenezer Howard et l’idéologie de l’industrialisme

Jean-Yves Tizot
Howard’s Garden City Scheme

1 The original ‘Garden City’ idea, the brainchild of Ebenezer Howard (1850–1928), was first formulated in 1898 in *To-morrow! A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*,¹ and is usually understood as a concept relating mainly to environmental and urban planning. It is often seen as the (seemingly) simple project of ‘marrying town and country’ (Howard 10), of fusing together rural space and the urban nexus, or the urban nexus into rural space. The Garden City is thus usually interpreted as an environmental concept, that is, one that is centrally informed by preoccupations about the spatial combination of different dimensions of social life such as housing, industry (in the sense of manufacturing activities), agriculture, business, municipal institutions, and transport infrastructure, to name but the most obvious—rather than centered round other structuring notions or paradigms. The contention of the present article is that this apprehension of Howard’s ‘big idea’ is very partial, in more than one sense. For one thing, it focuses on one aspect only of the Garden City programme—its spatial dimension; this spatially biased approach entertains (has entertained for a long time now) the illusion that the Garden City idea was one of the founding moments of modern spatial or urban planning in the United Kingdom and beyond and promotes a view of Howard as its father-figure. More importantly still, this interpretation obliterates what is, in the view presented here, the true origins of the Garden City scheme, namely the ideologies of (‘new’) liberalism and industrialism.

2 In what follows I consider that the dominant spatial/planning bias imposed on Howard’s idea by its ‘traditional’ interpretation is another misunderstanding standing in the way of an honest apprehension of Howard’s original intentions. But more than yet another source of misinterpretation, this is the central fault line in the dominant reading of Howard, the one that has led the experts and the uninitiated alike to look away from what
can reasonably be seen as the core of the Garden City concept: the ideology of 'industrialism', that is, the desire for and pursuit of a deepening and expansion of industrial production, an impulse that went as far as the industrial production of society as a whole. 'Industrial productivism' or 'industrialism' can also be defined as the belief that the industrial organisation of production, consumption, housing and social life and general is the best, most efficient, most satisfactory option, and that, in matters of industrial production and consumption, more is better. Nowadays—since we tend to take the industrial aspects of our lives for granted—this belief has taken on the form of the common pulpit platitude that 'growth is good for us'.

3 The discussion begins with a brief look at the consequences for the contemporary perception of the Garden City idea of the priority given historically to the spatial interpretation of Howard's scheme. The Garden City idea is then envisaged as a typical intellectual product of the industrial age, mainly drawing on sources clearly favourable to the expansion of industry as a mode of social organisation, technology and the ideal of private enterprise as central motive powers of modern society. The next two sections assess in particular the significance for the Garden City scheme of the legacies of J. S Buckingham's 'Model Town' Victoria and of Alfred Marshall’s notion of the 'industrial district'. In the final section, the discussion of Howard’s grand idea goes on to show how the process of urban expansion through the multiplication of ‘Social Cities’—Howard’s ultimate dream—, was envisaged as an industry unto itself.

The Spatial Bias: Origins and Consequences

4 Admittedly, Howard’s own essay can be called upon to support this partial interpretation—to a point. For example, he initially considered the imaginary name of ‘Rurisville’ to designate the basic urban unit of his utopian programme, although never used it as a generic name for his project. In the first part of the book Howard uses the perhaps less imaginative ‘Town-country’ for that purpose, and then simply ‘Garden City’—an appellation apparently inspired by one of Chicago’s by-names after the reconstruction that followed the 1871 great fire. These terms all point of course to a spatially oriented programme of reform, one that seems to be guided by the intention of harmonising the two types of human social space, the rural and the urban.

5 For the dominance of this spatial and environmental bias in the common perception of his programme, Howard himself is not, however, entirely or even mainly responsible. To-morrow! provides plenty of evidence that he did not at any moment structure his thinking exclusively or even predominantly along spatial/environmental lines, quite the contrary. A brief look at the overall plan of To-morrow! shows that the purely spatial aspects are dealt with in the first chapter of a book which contains thirteen. All other twelve chapters are devoted to the organisational, administrative, financial and management dimensions of the programme that was to be the ‘master-key’ to a new civilisation. Clearly the spatial/environmental dimension is important but is also far from being the only or even the main one in this programme. The spatial arrangements of the various elements were in fact subordinated to a specific order. The world of Garden City, or that of ‘Sociable Cities’ (as Howard called the clusters of individual Garden Cities that would
ideally replace existing metropolises), is principally organised according to one overarching principle, one that sets both a goal and an evolutionary process to the whole project: the expansion of industrialism as a mode of production transcending both socialism and capitalism until all developable land is colonised by ‘Social Cities’ (Fig.1).

Figure 1. The ‘Social Cities’ diagram

C. B. Purdom, an early Garden City enthusiast, supporter and collaborator of Howard’s in the Letchworth Garden City project, was also one of the theorists of the idea as well as a historian of the practical experiment. His book *The Garden City: A Study in the Development of a Modern Town* (1913) is an invaluable source on the spirit of the times and the true object of the reform enterprise that was Howard’s *raison d’être*. On the relation between the Garden City idea, its first implementation in Hertfordshire and urban planning in general, Purdom is very clear:

In any discussion of Garden City and its ideals we are sure to find the town spoken of as an example of town-planning, and it will be interesting, as it is necessary, to make the relation of Garden City to the town-planning movement quite plain. That relation may be expressed in very few words. Garden City is not, except incidentally, a town-planning scheme. The term does not appear in Mr. Howard’s book, and it was not used in connection with the initial propaganda which brought the town into being. (Purdom 201)

What Purdom meant by ‘incidentally’ is perhaps better understood with the nuanced explanation which immediately followed this first passage:

It is true that Garden City has a ‘town-plan’, and that in *Garden Cities of To-morrow* the necessity of a plan was made clear: ‘We now come to deal with an element of economy which will be simply incalculable. This is to be found in the fact that the town is definitely planned, so that the whole question of municipal administration
may be dealt with by one far-reaching scheme. . . . It is essential... that there should be unity of design and purpose—that the town should be planned as a whole, and not left to grow up in a chaotic manner as has been the case with all English towns, and more or less so with the towns of all countries’ (p. 51). It is true, also, that the development of the town in accordance with the townplan, and control over the kind and disposition of buildings, are or should be matters of definite rule in the Garden City. But they are, after all, ‘elements of economy’ in the thing, not the thing itself. In spite of that, the town has become entangled with the townplanning agitation of the last few years, and it is possible that it has been prejudiced in the eyes of some people in consequence. (Purdom 201)

In sum, the Garden City programme includes planning as one of its useful, ‘functional’ dimensions but it is not essentially centered around the idea of town planning itself, contrary to a common belief. In fact, the spatial/environmental interpretation of Howard’s ‘big idea’ gained ascendancy over others mostly after and because of the adoption of that particular bias by the town and country planning movement. This latter, although partly the creation of Howard himself early in the 20th century, has since consistently projected a mainly environmental version of the Garden City idea. This came to present a truncated and warped version of the original idea, instead of the more varied and balanced original view of its author. The spatial planning approach was also presented against the built-in industrial expansionary matrix that is the core of the Garden City vision (this being one of the paradoxes of the history of early contemporary planning discourse). Being validated by the authority of an increasingly established and institutionalised profession (especially after the Second World War), the spatial interpretation has become largely dominant in the planning subfield of social and political sciences and has tended to obliterate other, perhaps equally or possibly more significant dimensions of the original Garden City idea. In fact, the two architects who implemented Howard’s vision in the 1904 Letchworth Garden City project, Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin, initiated that trend by focusing more on the spatial determinations included in Howard’s various diagrams than on the global socio-economic programme. They have been followed in this error by many—perhaps most—planners and planning historians.

Some of the diagrams used by Howard (see figures 1, 2 and 3) to illustrate his vision of the relationship between the urban and the rural spheres have become famous among several generations of planning or architecture students for example, but have also reached the general public as curious and picturesque images of late-Victorian and Edwardian utopian thought.
Figure 2. The ‘Three Magnets’ diagram

Figure 3. The ‘Garden-City’ diagram
These pictures are all comprised within the first chapter. Spatial proposals, of course, lend themselves particularly well to visual representations and are more readily understood through plans and diagrams. To those who know them in their context, these illustrations are also often taken to represent, in an historical perspective, the seeds from which the contemporary planning institutions and doctrine grew. This tale of the origins was in turn propagated by planning educators and historians in the specialist literature, to the extent that Howard and his Garden City have now long assumed a seminal genealogical status in the commonly accepted version of the history of British planning, or indeed of contemporary planning worldwide. For many with an (even marginal) interest in the social and economic history and of course in the history of ideas of that period, the famous diagrams probably epitomise the planning ideal of the times, the vision of long-sought-after harmony between rural and urban activities, environments, constraints as well as advantages—the most elaborate utopian vision of an appeased industrial society. The Three Magnets diagram summarises this quest for harmony and is supposed to both demonstrate the possibility of achieving that harmony and show the way to reach it: building the ‘Town-Country’. What the diagrams do not and cannot convey is that the main driving force behind this endeavour towards the third kind of social space was industrial power.

Purdom is again useful to understand why planning laws, institutions and goals after the Garden City experiment were not inspired by Howard’s programme. Thus on the relation between the Garden City programme and the rise of town planning along ‘German’ lines (i.e. the growth of ‘planned “garden” suburbs’) in Britain after the passing of the 1909 Town and Country Planning Act, he writes:

The first outcome of the movement was the formation of garden suburbs, in which certain features of Garden City were copied; but the most important outcome was Mr. John Burns’s Housing and Town Planning Act of 1909. Now, it is only necessary to study these two things to see how utterly different, to see, indeed, how greatly opposed they and the Garden City are. Mr. Burns’s Act sets up machinery for the extension of towns and, like the garden suburbs, maintains the very thing which Garden City declares to be fundamentally wrong. It was to put an end to the extension of towns and the building of suburbs that Garden City was founded. It was to stop the great towns growing that the new town was begun. The essential idea of town-planning as it is practised in England is the antithesis of the Garden City idea. The town-planner says: We want to lay out in advance the land over which our towns are to spread; we want to schedule these green fields for the town more easily to swallow; we want to prepare for the endless growth of the huge monster. The Garden City says: We need to put a limit to the size of the town; we need to preserve these fields so that they shall not be destroyed; we need to re-make town life in small towns in the midst of the country. (Purdom 202–03)

Clearly, Howard’s programme has been, to this day, the object of a widespread, lasting and continued misapprehension on this essential point, to the extent of being interpreted against its original meaning. This is not, however, the only example of such far-ranging misconceptions, some of which have their origins in Howard’s writing. Elsewhere I have scrutinised Howard’s claim that he drew inspiration for his Garden City concept partly from the revolutionary radical Thomas Spence (1750–1814), and in particular his ‘Land Plan’ (Tizot). According to Spence’s radical programme, which was first published in 1795, self-governed parish-based municipal communities would own all the land and rent it out to the highest bidders and use the total product of the rents to finance public services for the inhabitants. Collective municipal ownership would also replace and eradicate all
forms of private property. In spite of his distrust of central government and of the modest powers he endows the latter in his plan, Spence was recycled by the Marxist socialists of the late Victorian era as one of their ancestors. He would be better described, however, as a primitive anarchist or anarcho-communist of sorts, more akin to the Russian émigré Kropotkin than to the centralist champions of land nationalisation à la Hyndman.

Whatever category one might be inclined to file Spence under, Howard’s own use of the ‘Land Plan’ idea was much less radical. Howard, himself more of the timid liberal than the angry revolutionary sort, did indeed borrow from Spence, but very selectively, to the point in fact of intellectually betraying his source, and his readers by the same token. Howard recycled Spence’s idea of a land rent payable to the municipal authority by users of the land for his Garden City scheme, but without ever mentioning Spence’s prerequisite of the appropriation of the land by the community through the dispossession of landlords. In effect, Howard’s community in the projected Garden City does not represent itself in a municipal body in the common sense of that word, and by no means does Howard ever envisage the expropriation of the great landlords. Far from it: the very feasibility of Howard’s plan is entirely premised on the idea of a ‘Garden City company’ initially buying a plot of land from an aristocratic ‘benefactor’ ready to sell a plot cheaply. The idea is for the Garden City company to be able to operate on its own land and outside of public urban regulations, in order to industrialise the countryside. The borrowing from Spence was therefore very partial, in more senses than one. Howard’s overt reference to and inspiration from Spence, however, has led to his idea being often misunderstood, and his own personal (or political) outlook in his endeavour grossly misinterpreted: some commentators still refer to Howard as a ‘socialist’ of sorts, which he was definitely not.

An Intellectual Artefact of the Industrial Age

In To-morrow! A Peaceful Path to Real Reform (1898), Ebenezer Howard proposed a blueprint for an ideal society, in which he formulated his solution to the so-called ‘Land question’ of the last two decades the 19th century (roughly speaking, the conjoined phenomena of the overcrowding of towns and cities, and the so-called ‘rural exodus’). Four years later in 1902, he retitled his work Garden Cities of To-morrow, but made no significant changes to the contents. In their book Sociable Cities, the Legacy of E. Howard, published in 1998 to coincide with the centenary of the publication of the first version of Howard’s To-morrow!, Peter Hall and Colin Ward claimed that ‘it was destined to become the most important and influential book in the entire history of 20th-century city planning’ (Hall and Ward, x). This superlative retro-prophecy might sound a little exaggerated, but Hall and Ward went even further in stating that ‘over the following 70 years, it effectively produced the pioneer garden cities of Letchworth and Welwyn, in which Howard took a personal role, and then—long after his death in 1928—some 30 new towns in the United Kingdom as well as countless imitations over the world’. I have already suggested what this kind of genealogical reasoning owes to the fable-of-the-origins mode of thinking. To think that that small book might be the main cause and origin of all of these posthumous developments is probably the reflection of an over-inflated estimation of Howard’s role and responsibility in what other people and changed circumstances did to his initial idea. Such a belief also perhaps marks a relative loss of perspective of certain planning specialists ensconced in their narrow disciplinary vision. But, away from the rather
arcane debates over Howard’s legacy and importance, and back to his original ideas: before being the ‘inventor’ of the Garden City concept, Howard was essentially a child of the industrial age. Inevitably perhaps, not surprisingly at any rate, his ideas and conceptions bore the typical hallmark of an epoch colonised by the expansionary and predatory domination of industry: he was an unmitigated champion of economic growth and in particular of industrial productivism, or industrialism, and his intellectual sources bear witness to this deep-rooted and far-ranging ideological conviction.

Howard had a grand vision of something he called the ‘Social City’: a ‘Central City’ surrounded by six satellite towns or ‘Garden Cities’, all with limited numbers of inhabitants. The famous diagrams and maps clearly show how complex and detailed—and even fastidious—Howard’s investigation of the topics of land reform and town planning had been before he ventured to publish his views on the subject. But spatial and planning aspects aside, the other core elements of the Garden City programme are actually not about planning or mapping as such. Rather, they can be described as being about the social organisation of a new sort of place and a new kind of space. In designing that proposed organisation, Howard drew on different sources. In the introduction to his book, Howard makes it clear that two out the three ‘proposals’ from which he initially drew inspiration were themselves influenced by the dominant ideological template of industrialism, and in Chapter 11 of his famous Garden City treatise Howard makes plain the origins of his own concept:

Shortly stated, my scheme is a combination of three distinct projects which have, I think, never been united before. These are: (1) The proposals for an organized migratory movement of population of Edward Gibbon Wakefield and of Professor Alfred Marshall; (2) the system of land tenure first proposed by Thos. Spence and afterwards (though with an important modification) by Mr. Herbert Spencer; and (3) the model city of James Silk Buckingham. (Howard 103)

If, as previously noted, the reference to the revolutionary radical Thomas Spence is rather problematic, and probably a case of intellectual deception (or perhaps fraud), that reference itself was only used by Howard to form a sort of radical/socialist backdrop to the central industrial motif of his core concept. Although Howard derived from Spence’s rent system his own idea of the ‘rate-rent’ of Garden City, whereby tenants contribute towards the repayment of the global mortgage of the land, the interests of the initially borrowed capital, and, in time, social services for the inhabitants of Garden City, he transformed the original meaning of Spence’s rent so as to fit his own purpose, so that the reference to the revolutionary radical has a mostly rhetorical value as a marker of radicalism—somewhat like a stage prop in an intellectual comedy of errors and dissimulation. Both other sources, however, are clearly on the liberal and ‘industrialist’ foreground of the British ideological scene.

The Marshall Legacy: Organised Migration

The first of these, the idea of ‘an organized migratory movement’ is perhaps best approached through the marginalist (‘neo-classical’) economist Alfred Marshall and his idea of the industrial settlement or ‘district’. The reference to the shady character of Edward Gibbon Wakefield, businessman, adventurer, politician and champion of British colonisation (as well as semi-professional eloper) serves in this context only insofar as Wakefield saw urban overcrowding in Britain as one of the main causes of the rampant
‘socio-economic problems’ (proletarian poverty and insalubrious living conditions), and the founding of overseas colonies as one of the main practical and most efficient solutions. He explained his approach in *A View in the Art of Colonization*, published in 1849. His scheme was based on the idea of the acquisition of the land by a ‘colonising company’ and its subsequent sale to investors. He also believed that a properly proportioned population of workers, artisans, merchants and other social categories would provide an adequate basis for successful and durable colonising settlements. Thus the seeds of Howard’s idea might well have come from Wakefield, but it was Marshall’s economic thinking which transplanted them onto British soil and allowed them to germinate and develop in an organised or even organic way. Marshall himself was an early supporter of the Garden City programme, as he found it reflected pragmatically some of his theoretical ideas, and he became one of the vice-presidents of the Garden City Association (the aim of which was to put into practice Howard’s idea) soon after it was created in June 1899. Howard’s borrowing from Marshall is in fact twofold.

18 Alfred Marshall’s idea of the ‘industrial district’ serves as the general background to the socio-economic inspiration here. The ‘ideal type’ of the industrial district was initially formulated by Marshall in his 1890 *Principles of Economics*, on the basis of empirical observations of industrial ‘company towns’ and other neighbourhoods on the outskirts of large cities which concentrated industrial activity and working-class housing. This ‘industrial cluster’ model represented in Marshall’s view the ‘optimum’ of competitive capitalism in the dominant neo-classical economics of the time: transaction (transport and communications) costs are reduced by the proximity and the connections between firms, recruitment of labour is facilitated, etc. Marshall later took up the concept in his 1919 *Industry and Trade: A Study of Industrial Technique and Business Organisation*, and elaborated further on the implications of this configuration in terms of the relative marginal utility of different organisational choices. At any rate, the idea of industrial clusters or districts was already well known at the time Howard was preparing the first version of his book, in the last decade of the 19th century, when Marshall’s *Principles* were already the main reference in academic economics (and were to remain a key reference for a good long time thereafter). That Howard drew on the main figurehead of modern economic science of this time comes as no surprise. But the legacy of Marshall’s ideas goes much further.

In the context of the Garden City concept itself, the reference to the great Victorian economist points more precisely to Marshall’s idea of an ‘organised migration’ of ‘surplus’ or (in his view) ‘redundant’ workers from the large overcrowded cities to new urban industrial settlements: ‘... [T]he general plan’, Marshal wrote, ‘would probably be for a committee, whether formed specially for the purpose or not, to interest themselves in the formation of a colony in some place well beyond the range of London smoke’ (Marshall 1884, 10). This ‘benevolent’ approach, as formulated in various articles and book chapters by Marshall, was supposed to benefit workers by affording them increased employment opportunities, cheaper housing, reduced transport costs and a healthier living environment, among other advantages, compared with crowded urban life. In an exord to Chapter 3, Howard has the distinguished Professor explain that the ‘removal’ of parts of the London proletariat would make impeccable industrial sense. The source is an article in the *Contemporary Review* entitled ‘The Housing of the London Poor’ from 1884, so pre-dating the publication of the *Principles of Economics* by a few years, and the quote (the first paragraph of the introduction) reads as follows:

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Whatever reforms be introduced into the dwellings of the London poor, it will still remain true that the whole area of London is insufficient to supply its population with fresh air and the free space that is wanted for wholesome recreation. A remedy for the overcrowding of London will still be wanted. [...] There are large classes of the population of London whose removal into the country would be in the long run economically advantageous; it would benefit alike those who moved and those who remained behind. [...] Of the 150,000 or more hired workers in the clothes-making trades, by far the greater part are very poorly paid, and do work which it is against all economic reason to have done where ground-rent is high. (Marshall 1884, 3)

Later Howard again quotes Marshall explaining which social groups the major benefits might accrue to: 'Ultimately all would gain by the migration, but most the landowners and the railroads connected to the colony' (Howard 1898, 50; his emphasis). Howard purported his system would make the 'people of Garden City', the workers, the collective owners of the land, and thus one of the main beneficiaries of the new urban-rural settlement, 'as members of a new municipality' (Howard 1898, 51). This, however, can only be true as an approximation, or even a series of connected approximations, since in reality the actual owner of the land would be the Garden City Limited Company, and the new settlement would be a municipality in a very analogical sense only, not in a legal and therefore legally binding sense. Additionally, the revenue accruing from the rent of land and the increase in land-value would be 'redistributed' through public services to the population, but not with a view to changing the social system of relative conditions and positions of employers and workers, for example. The 'benevolent' intentions were, in fact and rather fittingly, very socially conservative in outlook.

The Buckingham Template: Urbanism and Industrialism

The second source mentioned by Howard is James Silk Buckingham’s National Evils and Practical Remedies (1849). At the top of the list of remedies to the woes besetting the nation sat the idea of the 'Model Town' (named Victoria ad maiorem regnae gloriam), an industrious and industrial form of settlement. Here also the ‘national evils’ of working-class overcrowding, immorality, and intemperance, among others are to be defeated by the founding of a ‘colony’ or ‘new town’, an entirely planned settlement both uniting and segregating the different social functions such as housing, work, recreation, etc., as well as the different social classes. The book provides an artist’s rendition of the model town of Victoria (Fig. 3), where the abattoirs and various polluting industries are seen outside of the town itself, half a mile at least away from any housing according to Buckingham’s imagined regulations. The square concentric plan of the central town itself is a sure predecessor (in spite of the different geometry) of the circular concentric organisation of Howard’s Garden City and Social City (Fig. 1 and 2).

Figure 4. Plan of Buckingham’s Victoria (‘Plan of a Model Town for an associated temperance community’)

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Howard borrowed from Buckingham more than the scope of the present article would allow to show, notably in matters of ‘co-operation’ between social classes, governance, down to the method of acquiring the land necessary to set up the new ‘Model Town’. But central to Buckingham’s idea are on the one hand, the business model of a company-built town and, on the other, the absolute faith in industrial production as a process that can be harnessed for the profit of all classes. Buckingham writes with awe of the powers of manufacture, evident at the time in the fortune amassed by the likes of ‘the Gotts and Marshalls of Leeds; the Garnets, Birleys, and Houldsworths, of Manchester; the Guests, Thompsons, and Crawshays, of Wales; the Rothschilds, and Gurneys, and Barings, of London . . .’, who ‘have made, by cotton-spinning, iron-founding, railroads, and banking, their millions also, in these several branches of enterprise’ (Buckingham 172–73). ‘What, then’, asks Buckingham, ‘could hinder an Association of 10,000 persons—whose skill and labour should be so organized as to produce the highest possible results—from acquiring as much wealth for themselves?’ The strand of ‘collectivist capitalism’ evident in many aspects of Howard’s Garden City originated largely in Buckingham’s Model Town and its ‘Associated Community’. But Howard was never very straightforward about this, and he only referred to the Model Town as an inspiration only for the plan of his city, and forgot to mention all the other aspects which he derived from the utopian Victoria—especially not the attraction to the private enterprise model and the central place of industry in his reform programme.

Building on the wisdom gained from these inspirations, Howard purported to transcend the contradiction between socialism and capitalism, the two main competing ideologies of the day, by planting his vision firmly on what he perceived as the common ground of these two largely incompatible conceptions of society: industrialism, or the promotion of
modern industry' as a productive model and the industrial (factory or company) system as the dominant mode of social organisation. In chapter 11 of To-morrow!, entitled ‘The Path Followed Up’, his words and enthusiasm are reminiscent of Buckingham:

Not content with urging the necessity of increased production, I have shown how it can be done. While the other and equally important end of more equitable distribution is, as I have shown, easily possible, and in a manner which need cause no ill-will, strife or bitterness; is constitutional; requires no revolutionary legislation; and involves no direct attack on vested interest. Thus may the desires of the two sections of reformers to whom I have referred be attained. (Howard 117)

In spite of these proclamations of faith by Howard, and easy to find as they are, the authority of the spatial/environmental bias has meant that the Garden City legend (the Garden City as ancestor of contemporary town and country planning) and the Howard myth (Howard as founding father of modern planning) endure to this day. They have been sponsored and propagated mostly by the spatial planning professions who purport to be able to change society for the better by modifying only space and place determinants, but without ever intervening in the other structural dimensions of the social system, in particular class relationships, the division of labour, property/tenancy relationships, to name but a few. While there is very little doubt that life in general, and people’s lives in particular can be improved, or at least altered, by spatial and environmental changes, it seems strange that one of the most meaningful features of the Garden City proposal should have been left out to be ignored by the masses: simply that the Garden City programme is actually an early-20th-century liberal utopian project based on the ideal of private enterprise, and driven by the momentous force of the industrialist technological ideology, which was at the centre of the spirit of the time.

In effect, Ebenezer Howard’s ‘Garden City’ programme represents the most refined and sophisticated plan for a (supposedly) ideal social model along the main lines of the industrialism which so deeply marked the collective psyche of his time. This means that Howard’s concept was centrally structured and externally formatted by the belief in capitalist industry as a neutral force that could be harnessed for good, as a source of inspiration, energy and innovation that would deliver better conditions for all. This fundamentally religious faith, for all its pretensions to reform and moral superiority, fits impeccably within a ‘benevolent’ and politically benign approach of social conservatism and economic liberalism. The result being that Howard’s Garden City concept is perhaps the best example of an industrialist utopia.

There are two main aspects for which the Garden City concept can be described as an industrialist programme of technological reform as well as a socially and economically conservative project. First the Garden City can be described as modelled on the dominant format of private companies for its status, mode of organisation and 'governance'. The second strand of industrialism in Garden City is that its success is based on the presence and activity of the manufacturing industry within its economy. Industry is essentially what gives the Garden City land its value, and therefore creates the ‘increment’ or surplus value on which the financial viability of the entire scheme is premised.

A Private Industrial Enterprise

In spite of the Garden City scheme being most commonly understood through its spatial/environmental planning dimensions, there has been a growing realisation over the last
decades of the 20th century that the main interest of his plan probably lies elsewhere. Whereas, according to S. V. Ward, ‘[t]he social reformism of the garden city idea was quickly converted into an environmental reformism which was in turn technicalised and dissembled to form part of the emerging professional practice of town planning’ (Ward 1992), a number of commentators have gradually challenged this orthodoxy from the margins. Thus Fred Foldvary, for example, argued that the focus of Garden City reformism was not where the mainstream tradition usually situated it, and remarked that ‘Howard’s primary goal was the reform of economic arrangements rather than the mere architectural innovation ... His emphasis was on the city rather than the garden ... with a view towards decentralizing government’ (Foldavry 101).

Over time, this realisation has been continued and prolonged by other commentators, and more recently, Sadoux *et al.* have proposed that the ‘physical and design-related aspects of the Garden City project were far from central to Howard’s vision’, and noted that the essential element in Howard’s plan is in fact the ‘governance model’ he proposed to establish and operate the Garden City (Sadoux *et al.* 59).

Some, like the two Italian geographers Grazia Brunetta and Stefano Moroni, go even further. They consider Howard as one of two neglected precursors of a current liberal-libertarian agenda in land-use planning which they seem to endorse. The little book in which they refer to Howard in those terms is significantly entitled *Contractual Communities in the Self-Organising City*, while the subtitle *Freedom, Creativity, Subsidiarity* could easily be recycled as the libertarian motto of some tax-abolition society. The first of the alleged fore-runners of capitalist ultra-liberalism and proprietary self-governing communities is the ‘proprietary anarchist’ Spencer Heath, who has also been variously described as a libertarian or free-market activist. Heath, by training an aeronautical engineer and inventor, became early in life a follower of the Georgist doctrine of land nationalisation through the replacement of land-ownership by a single tax on land occupation. He was a long-time active member of the Chicago Single Tax Club and co-founder of the New-York Henry George School where he gave conferences on community organisation. But he later renounced his Georgist faith and the anti-landlord stance that was its basis. Heath went on to formulate the first expression of the ‘proprietary community principle’ in a short 1936 pamphlet entitled *Politics versus Proprietorship*. In it he replaced the anti-landlordism of the Georgists by an anti-state approach and an advocacy of local communities of landlords, free from the dual threat of crime and government, a message which he would expand on in his chief work *Citadel, Market and Altar* published by his own Science and Society Foundation in 1957. Heath was a key influence on the contemporary libertarian propagandist Murray Rothbard (in particular for the latter’s critique of Henry George’s ideas), and through him, on much of the U.S. American libertarian school of thought. More generally Heath was part of the neo-liberal inter-war counter-culture and early post-war revival.

Taking stock of the aforementioned renewed or ‘revisionist’ views on the Garden City idea, Brunetta and Moroni consider Howard, in their libertarian perspective, as a second major precursor of their own (and others’) ideas on the desirability and feasibility of what they term ‘contractual communities’ throughout their book. By this they mean privately owned, for-profit (mainly) large-scale real estate ventures hosting a variety of collective uses, of which the better-known examples are the proprietary community (business parks, residential or mixed-use estates under a single private owner) and the homeowners association. Private developments and towns, on the model of Disney’s
famous Celebration in Florida for example, are for them one of the ways in which private real-estate capitalism can evade the constraints and regulations of public administration.

31 Brunetta and Moroni’s investigation of Howard’s concept is quite clearly ideologically motivated and they do not try to hide it. But they do have a point: Howard did envisage the Garden City project as a private, and, if successful, profitable venture, especially—quite logically—for those who invest the most: the project is heavily dependent on industrial and commercial capital investment, and on the increase in land-value, and therefore of land rent revenues resulting from their success. The two libertarian geographers describe the concept as follows:

The fulcrum of Howard’s proposal (1898) is a particular form of organization of life in common. Garden City is original not so much for the presence of the green areas as, above all, for the organisational model that was proposed. Howard (1898) imagined that a group of people would buy uninhabited farm areas in order to found a settlement characterised as particular organizations, namely Garden Cities. Howard spoke explicitly of a ‘voluntary organisation’ [...]. He hypothesised that the necessary areas (6,000 acres) be bought through a special financial mechanism that involved a financial exposure to debt. This debt was something to be reduced progressively over time. The areas were to be entrusted to four ‘trustees’, who held the property ‘on behalf’ of the citizens [...]. Therefore Howard’s idea did not consider the state (public) ownership of land; Howard’s theoretical proposal, as presented in his book, does not call for the nationalisation of the land, not even through gradual steps (despite the fact that many authors keep asserting this is so). Land was to be owned in common by the citizens; this was just a particular form of private property. (Brunetta and Moroni 67)

32 The social community thus founded would depend on what Howard called the rate-rent, against the payment of which residents—rather than ‘citizens’—could freely use their lodgings, allotments, etc., and the businesses their shops, warehouses and so on, of which they would be, in effect, the tenants rather than the owners. The managing limited-dividend company would be their landlord. Howard explains in Chapter 2 of To-morrow! that once the initial debt had been cleared, the ‘rate-rent’ payments would go towards financing collective amenities and facilities, and eventually even welfare services such as old-age pensions, insurance policies against loss of income due to sickness or incapacity, and such like. Howard thought that the Garden City collective could manage a number of services the way municipalities did, but that the private sector could also step in to replace municipal services if and when they were found to be more efficient or cost-efficient than the latter. Among other advantages, the Garden City could thus afford itself the free choice of ‘service providers’ thanks to its own rate-rent self-financing system. The model put forward by Howard was thus a fusion—or confusion—of the public and corporate governance models and constitutes a retreat from the rule of law towards the rule of contractual bonds within the local community as well as between the community and the rest of society.

33 Howard could not put it more clearly than when he wrote that the organisational form of the ‘town estate’ would be structured like that of a ‘large and well-appointed business’ (Howard 67). Indeed the governance or, more properly, management of the Garden City is modelled very closely on the structure of a large private company, complete with board of directors—which is called ‘Board of management’—and shareholders—the rent-paying inhabitants and businesses, or tenants. The chairmen and vice-chairmen or the Board of management together form the ‘Central Council’;
In this council (or its nominees) are vested the rights and powers of the community as sole landlord of Garden City. Into its treasury are paid (after provision has been made for landlord’s rent and sinking fund) all rate-rents received from its tenants, as well as the profits derived from its various municipal undertakings, and these, we have seen, are amply sufficient to discharge all public burdens without any resort to the expedient of compulsory rates. The powers possessed by the Central Council are, it may be noticed in passing, more ample than those possessed by other municipal bodies, for whilst most of these enjoy only such powers as are expressly conferred on them by Acts of Parliament, the Central Council of Garden City exercises on behalf of the people those wider rights, powers and privileges which are enjoyed by landlords under the common law. The private owner of land can do with his land and with the revenue he derives from it what he pleases so long as he is not a nuisance to his neighbour; while, on the other hand, public bodies which acquire land or obtain power to levy rates by Acts of Parliament, can only use that land or spend those rates for such purposes as are expressly prescribed by those Acts. But Garden City is in a greatly superior position, for, by stepping as a quasi public body into the rights of a private landlord, it becomes at once clothed with far larger powers for carrying out the will of the people than are possessed by other local bodies, and thus solves to a large extent the problem of local self-government. (Howard 67, Chapter 6 ‘Administration’)

In Chapter 6 of To-morrow!, Howard is very fastidious in his description of the administrative structure of his board of management, which, apart from the Central Council, is made up of numerous ‘Departments’, arranged in three ‘groups’ (Public Control, Engineering, Social Purposes), each of which is divided into remit-specific sub-groups—these are the departments themselves. Clearly, the very organisation and language of Garden City governance is directly business-inspired, and modelled on the private enterprise management structure. In the words of Brunetta and Moroni: ‘Howard imagined that the organisational form of Garden City would be structured like a “large and well-appointed business”. In fact, Garden City is not a public municipality but a private voluntary organization’ (Brunetta and Moroni 65).

This organisation, however, is concerned with the internal functions of the Garden City as a human settlement (Howard’s ‘municipality’). Another powerful player in the Garden City game, according to Howard’s own rule book, was the limited-dividend company, which was accountable to investors alone. Whether it is the voluntary sector aspect or the for-profit intention which must actually dominate in the initial model is not clear, and Howard himself does not seem to have caught on the potential for conflict between the two (Hall and Ward 29).

In the story of Letchworth and Welwyn, the first two Garden Cities that came into being at the beginning of the 20th century, it was clearly the capitalistic venture that ruled over the ‘co-operative commonwealth’, not least because the directors of the latter were also the board of the former. But that is another story. What is essential here is that at the core of the Garden City’s social and economic system lies a form of corporate governance, and not of ‘local government’ according to the law of the land. Howard consciously chose this landowning and entrepreneurial model to by-pass the constraints and regulations of public local authorities and, in his own words, to solve ‘the problem of local self-government’ (Howard 68). He did not consider the exemption of the Garden City governing bodies from the common law of the land as a problem. Rather, it represented the elegant solution he had found to ‘carry out the will of the people’.
Conclusion: Industrial to the Core: The Garden City as a Machine, Urbanisation as an Industrial Process

Howard’s Garden City idea was conceived as a model of harmonious relations between manufacturing industry and agriculture. In this model, ‘green’ space is not primarily devoted to recreational or hygienic purposes. As Purdom put it, ‘the rural belt is no mere lung. It is not pleasure land’ (Purdom 118). Rural space in general is to be exploited according to the rules of technological rationality and efficiency, and therefore its use has to be ‘optimised’ along industrial lines. Under the Garden City regime, agriculture is envisaged simply as another branch of the modernised economy of the new settlement. Very naturally then, it too has to become industrialised; it is, after all just ‘another industry’, as Purdom implies:

In Garden City agriculture is once more brought into relation with other industries. There is no attempt to revive domestic industry, but in the encouragement of the most advanced and efficient methods of manufacturing and factory administration on the one hand, and by the stimulus to the best kind of farming on the other, results suited to modern conditions will be obtained. (Purdom 118)

As for the manufacturing industry itself, it occupies the central place in Garden City. Because industry was the most powerful motive social force of 19th-century Britain, Howard placed it at the core of his project. In the introduction of To-morrow!, he mobilises a number of voices from the (‘radical’) press and trade-unions who bemoaned the lack of employment opportunities for workers in towns and cities—the ‘discrepancy’ theme of the Three Magnets diagram:

The Star, 9th October 1891, says:

‘How to stem the drift from the country is one of the main problems of the day. The labourer may perhaps be restored to the land, but how will the country industries be restored to rural England?’

The Daily News, a few years ago, published a series of articles, ‘Life in our Villages’, dealing with the same problem.

Trade Unionist leaders utter the same note of warning. Mr. Ben Tillett says:

‘Hands are hungry for toil, and lands are starving for labour.’ Mr. Tom Mann observes:

‘The congestion of labour in the metropolis is caused mainly by the influx from the country districts of those who were needed there to cultivate the land.’ (Howard 4)

The Garden City solution is simply (in principle) to urbanise and industrialise the countryside, to ‘decentralise’ industry in other words: the rest will follow, because industry is the driving force of modern society. Purdom notes how many previous experiments in industrial ‘decentralisation’ (its location in the rural villages) were always caught up by the expansion of the chosen village or the nearby town, and quoted Arthur Shadwell’s then famous Industrial Efficiency, which was first published in 1905: ’Factories are constantly being put down in country places. All at the great towns ... are such places. ... Almost ideal in a plain way. And what happens? The ideal village makes all the haste it can to grow into a town and to imitate other towns’ (Purdom 141).

From the Garden City perspective, Purdom’s diagnosis of this chronic failure is simple, as is the answer:

None of these attempts have aimed at breaking up the town and spreading it, with its various activities, over the country. Yet that, it seems reasonable to suppose, is the one way in which the twentieth century will solve the problem of the town,
which is also the problem of industry and the home. The towns will be split up and scattered and will make innumerable small and compact residential and industrial centres, which rapid transport will bring close together and link up with London. The Garden City is the first organised attempt to give effect to that movement. Its promoters said of it, years before it was founded, that it would 'possess a greater measure of productive power than a town built up in a chaotic and unsystematic manner'; there can be no doubt in the minds of those who watch the signs of the times that the conditions of industry prevailing there are among the most efficient of our day. (Purdom 141)

41 The importance of the ‘productive power’ of industry is obvious. But there was more at stake in the Garden City project than simply the dynamic value of industry. Garden City itself is entirely made of and inhabited by industrial plants, industrial technology and artefacts, the urban infrastructure being a case in point:

Running all round the Central Park (except where it is intersected by the boulevards) is a wide glass arcade called the ‘Crystal Palace’, opening on to the park. This building is in wet weather one of the favourite resorts of the people, whilst the knowledge that its bright shelter is ever close at hand tempts people into Central Park, even in the most doubtful of weathers. (Howard 14)

42 The city itself is bound by a ‘scientific frontier’ (Chambers 20) materialised by the location of industrial plants and the circular railway surrounding the urban element. In the Garden City, industry is part of the city itself not just because Howard did not want to isolate industrial production from the rest of the community’s life, but fundamentally because he believed industry was the core urban function. Being so central to the Garden City concept, industry cannot be separated from other urban functions and Howard sees the new kind of city he proposed as a place of harmony between industry and civic life. However, given the priority granted to the corporate element in Garden City, there can be little doubt which one rules supreme.

43 ‘Social City’, the cluster of Garden Cities that was supposed to replace the old metropolis model, was, for Howard, a ‘duplicable module’ (Chambers 22). Howard dreamed of an urban-industrial mechanism, which, once set in motion, would colonise the whole country. The core of this dream was a formidable vision of the city as a social machine, and of urbanisation as an unstoppable industry unto itself. For Howard, industry was both the raw energy that animates urban space and the elementary constituent of urban places. At the end of the 19th century, Howard’s Garden City idea offered an industrial utopian vision typical of its age and provided one of the most vivid illustrations of the ideology of industrialism ever to be conceived, one which uniquely unveils the dystopian potential of such a programme.

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NOTES

1. Hereafter *To-morrow!*

2. See for example Oliver Wainwright’s article in the *Guardian* (on-line edition) entitled 'The garden city movement: from Ebenezer to Ebbsfleet. George Osborne’s plan for 15,000 homes in Kent is rooted in the vision of a radical socialist, but can the model work today?', 17 March 2014. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/architecture-design-blog/2014/mar/17/ebbsfleet-garden-city-george-osborne.
ABSTRACTS

In Tomorrow! A Peaceful Path to Real Reform (1898) Ebenezer Howard proposed a blueprint for an ideal society, in which he formulated his solution to the ‘Land question’—roughly speaking, the conjoined phenomena of the overcrowding of towns and cities, and the so-called ‘rural exodus’. His was a vision of a ‘Social City’: a ‘Central City’ surrounded by six satellite towns or ‘Garden Cities’, all with limited numbers of inhabitants. The famous diagrams and maps show how complex and detailed and even fastidious Howard’s investigation of the topic of land reform had been before he ventured to publish his views on the subject. While his programme is usually known for these spatial aspects, the other core elements of the Garden City programme are actually not about planning or mapping, but about the proposed social organisation. In the introduction to his only book, Howard makes it clear that two out the three ‘proposals’ from which he initially drew inspiration were themselves influenced by the pregnant ideological template of industrialism: Buckingham’s ‘Model Town’ of Victoria and Alfred Marshall’s ‘industrial district’. Howard purported to transcend the apparent contradiction between socialism and capitalism by planting his vision firmly on the common ground of these two supposedly incompatible conceptions of society. Ebenezer Howard’s ‘Garden City’ proposal is thus arguably the most accomplished formulation of a plan for an ideal social model along the main lines of the collective psyche and experience of industrialism.

Dans son livre Tomorrow! A Peaceful Path to Real Reform (1898; traduction française Les Cités jardin de demain, 1969) Ebenezer Howard proposait le schéma d’une société idéale et y formulait sa solution à la « question de la terre », c’est-à-dire les phénomènes conjoints de la congestion urbaine et de l’exode rural. Sa vision est centrée sur la « Cité sociale » : une Cité centrale entourée de villes-satellites, toutes ayant un nombre limité d’habitants. Ses célèbres diagrammes et cartes montrent combien était complexe, détaillé et même pointilleux l’examen qu’Howard fit de la réforme agraire, avant qu’il ne se risque à rendre publiques ses vues sur le sujet. Alors que son programme de réforme est habituellement connu pour ses aspects spatiaux, les autres dimensions centrales du projet de Cité-jardin ne relèvent pas en fait de la cartographie ou de la planification, mais du mode d’organisation sociale envisagé. Dans l’introduction à son unique livre, Howard indique clairement que deux des trois « propositions » desquelles il s’était inspiré étaient elles-mêmes influencées par la matrice idéologique de l’industrialisme : la « Ville modèle » de Buckingham, nommée Victoria, et le district industriel d’Alfred Marshall. Howard prétendait dépasser l’apparente contradiction entre le socialisme et le capitalisme en implantant fermement sa vision sur ce terrain partagé par ces deux conceptions de la société. Le programme de la Cité-jardin d’E. Howard est donc vraisemblablement une des expressions les plus accomplies d’un projet de société idéale, élaboré selon les grandes lignes de forces de l’idéologie et de l’expérience collective de l’industrialisme.
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Keywords: Garden City, Howard (Ebenezer), industrial district, industrialism, urban planning, capitalism, liberalism, social reform, conservatism

Mots-clés: Cité-jardin, Howard (Ebenezer), industrialisme, district industriel, industrie, planification urbaine, capitalisme, libéralisme, réformisme social, conservatisme

AUTHOR

JEAN-YVES TIZOT

Jean-Yves Tizot is lecturer in contemporary British history and civilisation at the university of Grenoble. He works on UK economic and social history and the history of ideas, in particular topics relating to urban policy, planning and utopia, as well as the ideology of development. On E. Howard’s Garden City, he has published an article entitled ‘Radical legacy or intellectual indelicacy? Ebenezer Howard’s use of “the most admirable project of Thomas Spence” in the Garden City concept’.

Jean-Yves Tizot est maître de conférences en histoire et civilisation britannique contemporaine à l’université de Grenoble. Il s’intéresse à l’histoire économique et sociale et à l’histoire des idées du Royaume-Uni des xixe et xxe siècles, en particulier aux sujets touchant aux politiques urbaines et à l’urbanisme et à l’utopie, mais également à l’idéologie du développement. Au sujet de la Cité-jardin d’E. Howard, il a publié un article sur les emprunts de Howard au radical révolutionnaire Thomas Spence intitulé « Radical legacy or intellectual indelicacy ? Ebenezer Howard’s use of “the most admirable project of Thomas Spence” in the Garden City concept » (« Héritage radical ou tromperie intellectuelle ? L’usage du “très admirable projet de Thomas Spence” par E. Howard »).