

Paradise Planned: The Garden Suburb and the Modern City

Robert A. M. Stern, David Fishman, and Jacob Tilove, 2013

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In *Paradise Planned: The Garden Suburb and the Modern City*, authors Robert A. M. Stern, David Fishman, and Jacob Tilove, all architects affiliated with Robert A. M. Stern Architects (RAMSA), offer “[t]he definite history of the development of the garden suburb, a phenomenon that originated in England in the late eighteenth century, was quickly adopted in the United States and northern Europe, and gradually proliferated throughout the world” (front flap). The book has a foreword by the authors, including a quote by Frederick Law Olmsted (“No great town can long exist without great suburbs”), nine chapters, an epilogue, notes, illustration credits, and an index.

The nine chapters are grouped according to location, time, and subtype of garden suburb. Each chapter discusses specific developments and provides the location, the year developed, and specific information about the planner(s), the architect(s), and the developer(s) involved, including ordinance survey maps, tithe maps, plat maps, Census maps, sales maps, locator maps, and key maps; regional plans, waterfront plans, partial plans, land use plans, master plans, perspective plans, site plans, block plans, and (initial and final) plans; aerial views and bird’s-eye views; axonometrics, elevations, (aerial) renderings, design sketches, watercolors, perspectives, depictions, panoramas and panoramic views, profiles, diagrams, and studies; time tables of railroads, (real estate) advertisements, sales plats, auction notices, and promotional brochures; and pictures of models and paintings, pictures of submissions to competitions, and pictures of houses and neighborhoods in the garden suburbs.

Chapter one presents origins, primarily from England but also an example from France. Chapter two is about the garden suburb in America (1850 to 1940). Here, neighborhoods typically in large cities that are primarily in the Northeast, the Midwest, the West but also in the South are introduced and described; the latter part of this chapter focuses on railroad, streetcar, and then automobile suburbs, followed by a section on urban suburbia.

Chapter three discusses the self-sufficient garden city, “an independent entity near a metropolis but with its own industry, government, and [...] residential neighborhoods” (p. 203) in Europe and America (1869 to 1940), based on Ebenezer Howard’s *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (1898). Sections in this chapter are about utopian precedents, architectural grammar and vocabulary, and English, American, French, and German garden cities.

Chapter four covers the resort garden suburb in America (1866 to 1930), located in or near commuter suburbs, serving as residential golf clubs, summer settlements, and finally resort suburbs, some of which are on islands, peninsulas, shores, harbors, ocean fronts, or beaches. The last section in this chapter is on Florida, termed “a national winter suburb.”

Chapter five is about the garden suburb in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland (1900 to 1940), including a discussion of the London County Council, founded in 1889, which provided funding for planned suburban villages and enclaves for workers until World War I.

Chapter six discusses the garden suburb in Europe (1900 to 1940) and presents numerous examples of suburbs in Germany, France (including railroad workers' villages, developments in Paris-Banlieue, provincial garden suburbs, and resort suburbs at La Côte Basque), Belgium (including provincial suburbs), The Netherlands (including villa parks and developments in Rotterdam, Hilversum, Amsterdam, Haarlem, and The Polder), Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

Chapter seven covers the globalization of the garden city and the garden suburb (1900 to 1940), with expected and surprising examples from Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Australia, New Zealand, India, Zambia, South Africa, Egypt, Palestine, Greece, Russia, China, Vietnam, and Japan.

Chapter eight is about the industrial garden village in Europe (1774 to 1940), facilitated by railroads, streetcars, and finally the automobile, with examples from England, Wales, Scotland, France, Germany (including the Krupp colonies), Belgium, The Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Norway, Italy, Switzerland, and Czechoslovakia. Finally, chapter nine is about the industrial garden village in the United States, Canada, and Mexico (1822 to 1940), with several dozen examples of these developments all over each nation.

The epilogue discusses the rise and fall of the garden suburb, including the decreased dependence on public transportation and the increased dependence on the automobile, which challenged the future of the garden suburb, leading to Disneyland; Subway Suburb, Stern's suggestion for the 1976 Biennale in Venice/Italy; Seaside, the New Urbanist coastal resort community on the Florida panhandle; Celebration, also located in Florida; as well as the Experimental Prototype Community of Tomorrow (EPCOT, "a utopian, decidedly futuristic city designed on a radial plan not unlike the diagram devised by Ebenezer Howard in 1898" (p. 957)). Stern et al. conclude that "the garden suburb is the best template yet devised to achieve a habitable earthly paradise [...it] may well hold the key to the future of our cities" (p. 961).

In the foreword the authors argue that garden suburbs are valued by the public but "little appreciated or even discussed by a majority of today's social scientists, planners, and architects" (p. 12). This reviewer agrees with the authors that garden suburbs are valued by the public and that they are little discussed by a majority of today's professionals. Indeed, over the past two decades, the suburban literature has been concerned with Post-World War II suburbs and their potential decline. While many suburbs were established and expanded after World War II, some were established well before that time. Nowadays, garden suburbs are often located close to modern-day central cities or clusters of work places and sometimes close to public transportation, making commuting affordable. Most of these neighborhoods are characterized by integrated green and open spaces. Many have a housing stock characterized by non-mass produced, high-quality construction and design, making housing investments sustainable.

The authors claim that “[social scientists, planners, and architects] have preferred to indiscriminately lump the garden suburb into the broad-based rejection of suburbanism as a whole” (p. 12). This is an interesting point, illustrating the need for these three professional groups to collaborate more often. Since the mid-1980s the literature on suburbs, authored by social scientists and planners, has repeatedly discussed changes in suburbs’ demographics, socioeconomics, and housing stock. While earlier works have focused on suburban decline and diversity, more recent works have focused on poverty and the possible end of suburbs, which may indicate a reduced gap between reality and perceptions. Indeed, many works seem to tar all suburbs with the same brush. While descriptions, anecdotal evidence, archival research, expert interviews, and descriptive statistics were common from the 1908s to the mid-2000s, expert interviews, typologies, and quantitative (especially regression) analyses have been utilized since the mid-2000s. Works that fall into the latter group, however, do differentiate between and among suburbs (Anacker, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013; Hanlon, 2010; Kneebone and Berube, 2013; Mikelbank, 2004; Orfield, 2002; and Vicino, 2008). Admittedly, none of these works, typically undertaken at the national scale, assign a separate class to garden suburbs, as there are only one or at most a few in each metropolitan area and they are scattered all over the nation and the planet, as Stern, Fishman, and Tilove competently demonstrate.

The authors have laid an excellent foundation on where to find garden suburbs for future analyses by social scientists and planners. The very recent, emerging focus on suburban sustainability will help lead a renewed interest in pre-World War II suburbs, including garden cities (Anacker, in progress). This book will be of interest to architects, planners, social scientists, historians, and geographers, among others.

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Katrin B. Anacker

School of Policy, Government, and International Affairs

George Mason University