

From the Garden City to the Red Village: Howard's Utopia as the Ground for Mass Housing in Soviet Russia.

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Abstract

Beautiful urban utopia by E. Howard promised an ideal city model that combined comfort of the town life with rural paradise. Experiment resulted in fascinating suburbs around the world, yet none of them proved sustainability of the garden city model. The concept greatly influenced on the XXth century urban theory and stimulated various mass housing solutions.

Present paper traces destiny of the garden city concept in Soviet Russia. A guiding idea for constructivists, it inspired new type of housing - zhilmassives - semi-autonomous estates within bigger cities that combined independent infrastructure with close connection to peer towns. State watched Avant-Garde experiments and used their outcomes to set control over population, which resulted in appearance of the "red villages": settlements near industrial centers that neither allowed tenants to master land nor use benefits of urban life.

To prevent the raise of autonomous self-maintained households, garden city concept was declared a utopia that propagated bourgeois lifestyle and that was hostile to the ideas of collectiveness promoted through official housing policy. Yet the poor living conditions in the red villages were explained by the failure of the garden city concept and functionalist practice per se, in spite of the fact that those settlements had little relation to both.

Tracing the history of the garden city concept in the early Soviet Russia, I reflect on how and why it could happen.

Keywords: Garden city, urban utopia, Soviet Russia, Avant-Garde architecture, housing estates.