Pioneers in sustainable community planning: Thomas More, Ebenezer Howard and John Egan

Author: Harm Jan Korthals Altes, Saxion University of applied sciences

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Introduction

Sustainability is of great importance in current society. In order to get some background information about the concept of the sustainable community and its planning process, we study in this article 3 pioneers who have published about this subject: Thomas More (1478-1535), Ebenezer Howard (1850-1927) and John Egan (born 1939).

A brief summary about the content of either three planning models is given in this article, leading in the end to a comparative analysis (overview of differences and similarities) between the three models.

| Thomas More | Ebenezer Howard | John Egan |

Thomas More: Utopia

As early as 1516, Thomas More published a book about a large scale model for sustainable communities, called 'Utopia'. This means, from two ancient Greek words: 'Nowhereland' (Ou=none; topos=place). Utopia is a non-existing Island as big as the United Kingdom located somewhere in the Atlantic Ocean close to the Brazilian coast.

The south American continent was discovered 15 years before, by Vasco da Gama. It was called 'the New World'. Thomas More gives a clear description of the island 'Utopia'. There are 54 independent towns, 40 km distant from each other, with a population of about 30.000 people (see map made by Ortelius on the next page). The towns were very similar in design and layout. The towns consisted of 4 wards (*Dutch: wijken*) around a central square where the town government building was located. Health and welfare were important features in the design and layout of the towns. Every town was located near a river, containing sweet water, suitable for the supply of water for the residents of the town. The town was provided with 4 hospitals, located at the edges of the town. There were no villages between the cities. In the countryside were scattered farms, collectively organised, where people from the neighbouring town worked in shifts for a couple of years and then returned to their usual work in town. Everything in Utopia (land, commodities, buildings, houses) was collectively owned. Nothing was privately owned. The society was egalitarian. Thomas More's goal with this measure was to ban poverty out of society (many people were poor in the days of Thomas More).

From the names of the towns as well as the rivers, it is clear that Utopia did not exist. On the map, you see names such as 'Keinstadt', 'Nulleville' and 'Niebylowna' (the latter is Polish for: that what does not exist). The rivers bear names such as 'Onwater', 'Sanspoisson' and 'Bezbrzega' (the latter is Polish for: without borders). Why all these strange names? Thomas More did not want to look suspicious for the leader of the United Kingdom, King Henry VIII (1491-1547). Henry VIII was a very authoritarian ruler. Everybody who criticised him could be put in prison.

'Utopia' was not meant as a planning model. Thomas More did not have the illusion that 'Utopia' could be realised in the UK or in another country. It was only a hidden critique on the organisation and government of the society of those days.

King Henry VIII was a ruler by inheritance. In Thomas More's Utopia, however, leaders were *elected* (which was a very revolutionary concept for the 16th century). Each of the 4 wards of the town elected and appointed one leader. These 4 leaders together were ruling the town. One of the 4 leaders was appointed to participate in the national government. There were meetings of all the 54 leaders in the capital town (located in the middle of the island, and bearing the name *Amaurotus*) several times a year, in order to discuss and decide about affairs of national importance.

There was no interactive planning in Utopia, nor any other form of direct democracy. In case you wanted to change something in the planning, layout or design of the town, you had to go and talk to the elected leader of your ward.
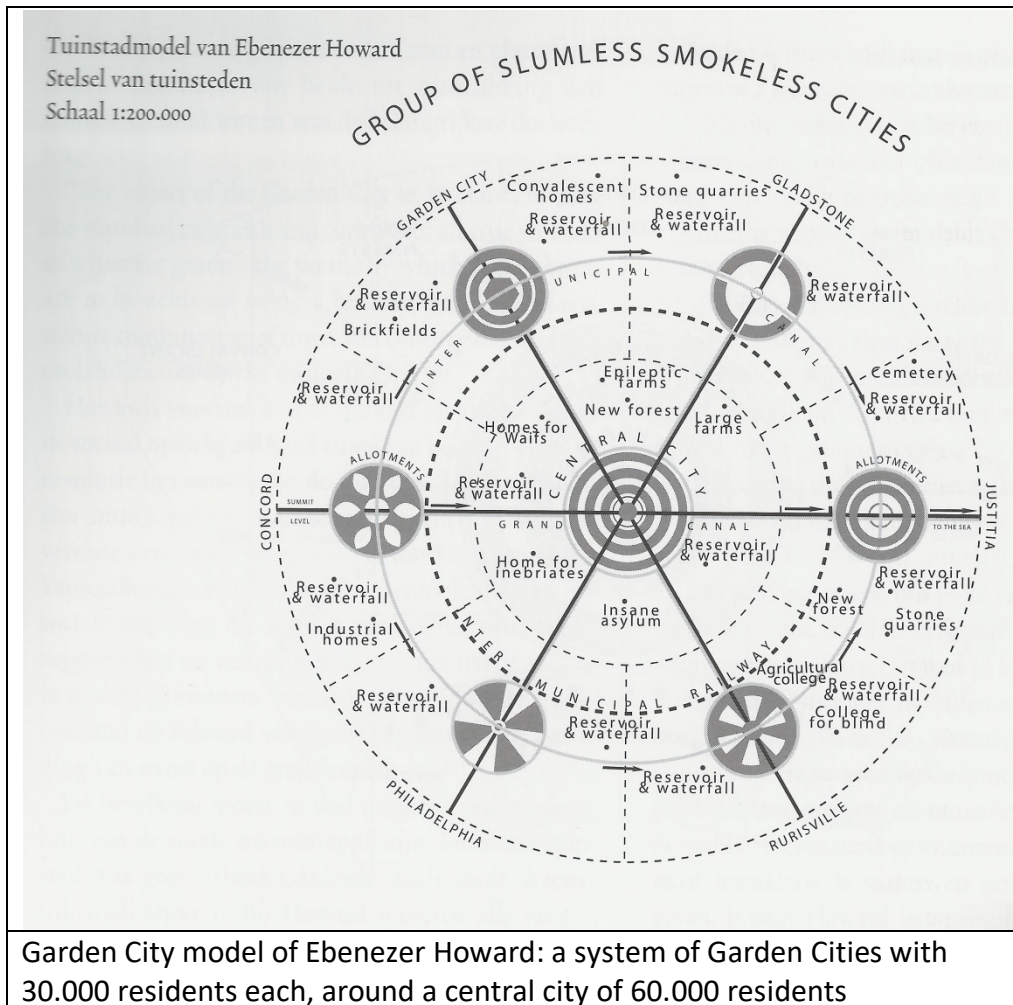
Map of Utopia made by Orthelius, 1596

Ebenezer Howard: the Garden City model

In 1902, Ebenezer Howard (1850-1927) published his book 'Garden cities of tomorrow'. The book contains a clear vision of the planning and design of a sustainable community. In the 4 centuries between Thomas More and Ebenezer Howard, the UK became a democracy, with elected leaders and a well-functioning parliament. The King or Queen has only ceremonial functions and no real power any more. Howard could publish his book without being afraid for being put in jail for it. Howard meant his Garden city model for realisation. That is a big difference between the Garden City model and Thomas More's 'Utopia'.

A Garden city should grow to a maximum of 30.000 people. The reason for this strict maximum is that Howard wanted to realise a system of local democracy. In his vision, this can only be realised when the community of a town is 'over viewable'. At the moment the first town reached its maximum population, a second town should be planned and built. At the moment this second town reached its maximum population, one had to start a third town, etcetera. Howard drew a map of 6 Garden Cities about 6 km distant from each other (see diagram on next page), located in a circle around a central city. The central city could

grow to a higher maximum: 60.000.

Garden City model of Ebenezer Howard: a system of Garden Cities with 30.000 residents each, around a central city of 60.000 residents

Is the Garden City feasible? Yes, two towns have been designed and built in the years 1902-1927: Letchworth Garden City and Welwyn Garden City. These generally follow the model including the collectively owned land. Later examples follow mainly the design guidelines, but not the administration model.

Is the Garden City 'sustainable'? Yes, but sustainability was not the most important planning target. The model deals mainly with *health improvement*, which was very urgent in those days. Howard foresaw good drainage, low density, prevention of air pollution, clear water supply, accessible and attractive parks and natural beauty of the countryside around the town.

As to sustainability, Howard wanted to make his Garden city environmentally friendly. On the map of 6 Garden cities around a central city, we see an efficient railroad network. The public transport in the model is excellent. Furthermore, we see a water power supply system. The water is led from a higher level (see 'summit level' at the left side of the map) to the lower level (see 'to the sea' at the right side of the map). The water made its way via a

system of reservoirs and canals to hydro-electric power plants, which were located in the industrial zone of each Garden city.

Is the planning and design, according to Howard, an interactive process? The land in the Garden city is collectively owned in Howards model. You can rent a piece of land from the community, but it will never become your private property. People in town have a say in decisions about the designation, layout and design of vacant pieces of land. In order to understand how this democratic process works, one has to look to the administration model which Howard designed for the Garden city (see diagram below).
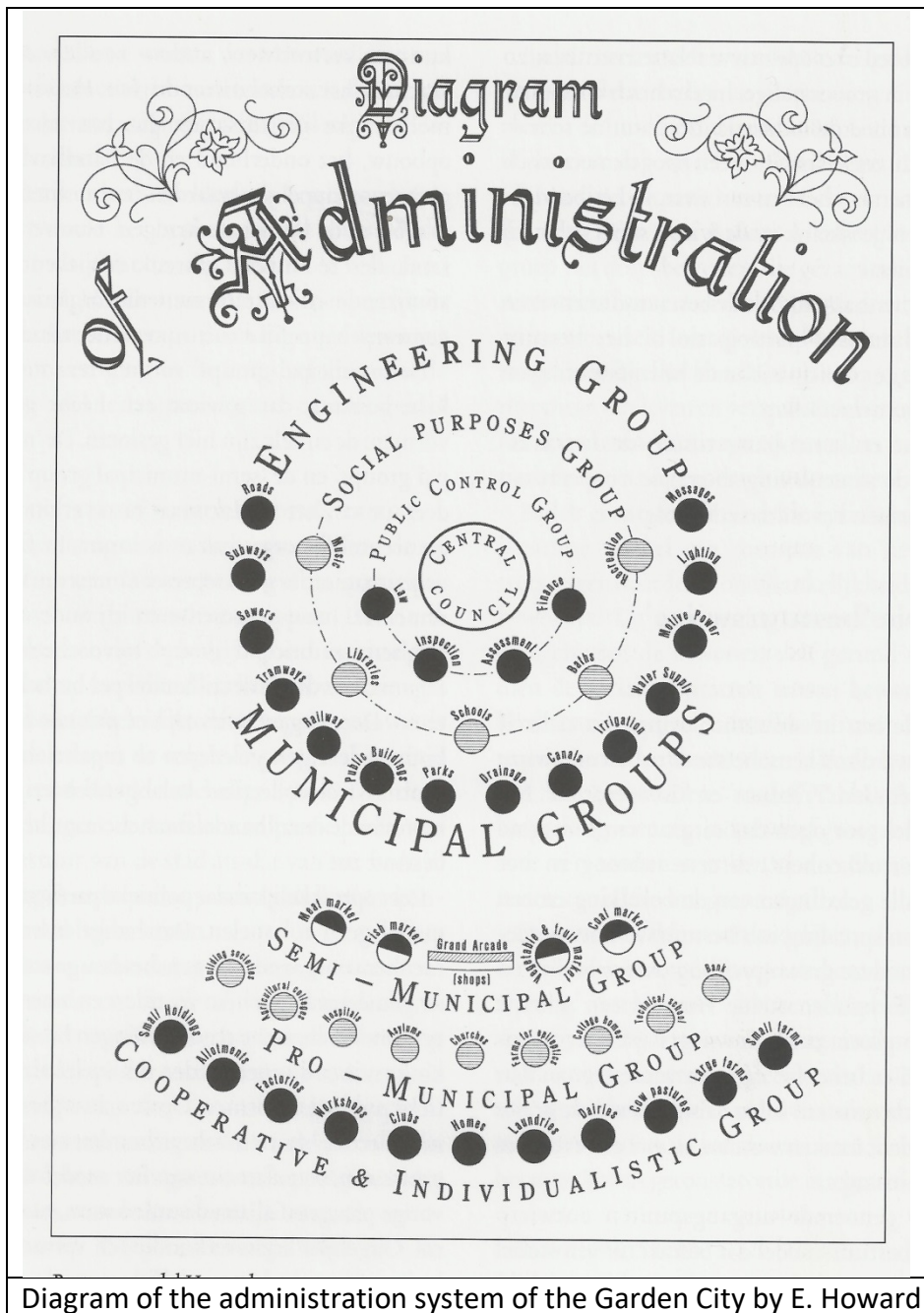

Diagram of the administration system of the Garden City by E. Howard

In the model, you see closed circles with professional groups around a central council. The directors of all professional groups are elected by the people. Together, these directors form the central council. In wider circles (the not-closed circles), you see ´semi municipal groups´ (these represent retail enterprises), pro-municipal groups (these represent facilities) and 'cooperative and individualistic groups'. The latter groups consist of citizens, representing various activities and facilities. People do not get paid for the work they do in these groups. The groups develop ideas for the design or the management and lobby actively for the realisation of the ideas towards the professional groups. For example, suppose you are a group of 20 people who want to realise a project for allotments (Dutch: *volkstuinen*). The first step is choosing the location. This is done in a process of group democracy. Second step is making a plan. This is also done in a process of group democracy. Third step is contacting the relevant professional municipal group, in this case: 'Parks'. You go to one of the employees of this group, you explain your plan and you discuss about the amount of rent to pay for the piece of land concerned. Maybe you have to speak with the director of the park-department as well. He is the deputy of the park-department in the central council. He has to support your plan and the amount of rent you are willing to pay for the land. As soon as you got the town administration on your side (including the final decision about your proposal in the central council), you work towards realization together.

In short: Howards Garden City model is dealing with aspects of a sustainable community, such as health and environmental friendliness, and it offers a way of interactive planning via a system of lobby groups, surrounding the professional groups and the central council within the town administration.

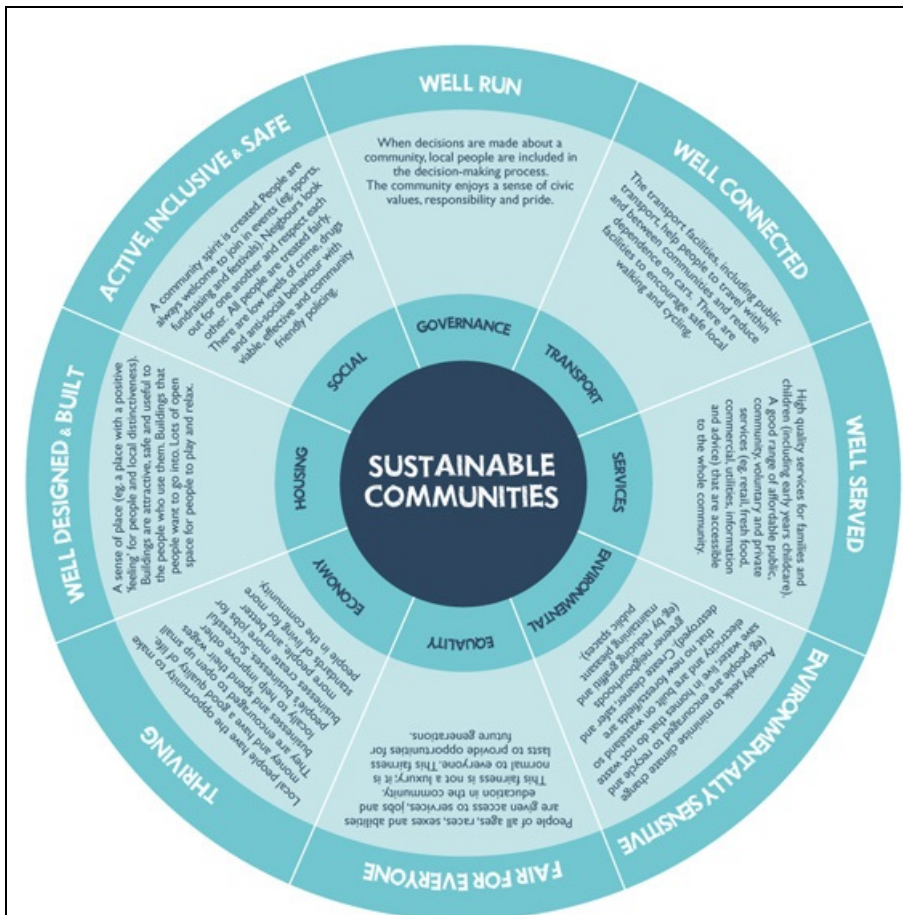**Sir John Egan: sustainable community**

If you look on the internet for recent literature about sustainable communities, you will certainly come across the 'Wheel of Egan'. The Wheel (see diagram on next page) contains 8 compartments mentioning components and subcomponents of a sustainable community. The community is:

1. Well run
2. Well connected
3. Well served
4. Environmentally sensitive (= friendly)
5. Fair for everyone
6. Thriving (Dutch: *bruisend*)
7. Well designed and built
8. Active, inclusive and safe.

The idea of the text wheel is: try to meet as many components as is possible in the given situation of a community project. If you succeed in meeting all criteria, you get a perfectly

sustainable community.

Text wheel of 8 components constructing a sustainable community

(Originally by the Egan Review Group, 2004).

If we look at this list of components and compare them the Garden City model of Ebenezer Howard, we see a switch from *health* to other items such as equality and environmental friendliness. If we look to 'Utopia' (Thomas More), we see equality as one of the most important planning targets. Equality is the connecting item between More and Egan. Thomas Thomas More provides for equality by collectivising all land, goods and buildings. In the Egan model, equality is realised by less revolutionary means, such as the accessibility of jobs and services, and efficient public transport. Egan's equality is more *social inclusiveness* (i.e. nobody is excluded from jobs, services or participation in certain activities).

John Egan (born 1939) was not an urban planner, but a leader in automotive industry. He made Jaguar a profitable company again. He had (and still has) several side-jobs, among others the chair of the UK *Institute of Management*. Because of his great leadership, Egan was appointed in 2003 as the chairman of the *Sustainable Communities Review Group*, a

group of 16 expert members which got the assignment from the UK government to formulate recommendations for better urban planning. (The UK government was unsatisfied by the planning practice in these days, which resulted in scattered, isolated and mono-functional developments). Egan led the Review Group, discussing the question how the current urban planning process could be re-organised, aiming at better planning results: integrated, well-connected, comprehensive and sustainable communities. In 2004, the group produced the report *Skills for Sustainable Communities, the Egan Review*. This report (you can find it on Blackboard) introduced the earlier mentioned 'Wheel of Egan' (page 19-21 of the report). The 2003 version of the wheel contained 7 components instead of 8. *Fair for everyone* was added in later versions.

Is the Egan Wheel only about sustainable communities or is it also about interactive planning? The latter, because if you look to the component *Well Run*, you see as a subcomponent: *local people are included in the decision-making process.*

The Egan Wheel is especially useful while formulating planning targets for a community that needs to be sustainable. In an Interactive Planning process, one could best work with the recent version of the Wheel. One has to look well at the 8 components: are they all applicable in the project situation? If any component is not: skip it. Chose only the relevant components. It is important to set clear planning targets, as SMART as possible; the planning targets can be derived from the subcomponents in the Egan Wheel.
Together, the planning targets result in a vision and later on in a zoning plan and a design for the community. When the vision and eventually also the zoning plan is ready in draft, it is time to consult all involved stakeholders in the planning process, to discuss with them and get them on your side.
Who are the stakeholders? Page 100-102 of *The Egan Review* provides a full list of possible stakeholders, divided in *Core occupations* and *Associated occupations*. In the first category, you will have to deal with several departments of the local authority, housing associations and project developers. In the second category, you will have to deal with many agencies, varying from the Chambers of Commerce and health service professionals to police officers. Look to your planning targets and choose the right parties to communicate and negotiate with.

In short: Egan offers a list of 8 components which would deliver a perfectly sustainable community if all of them would be realised. The initiative taking party has to choose the relevant components and to work out the subcomponents in SMART planning targets. This leads to a vision and eventually a zoning plan or a design, which is to be discussed and negotiated with relevant stakeholders.

Comparative analysis: differences and similarities between 3 'Utopians'

In order to get a deeper understanding of the three discussed models, the table below gives an overview of differences and similarities between the models.

	Thomas More	Ebenezer Howard	John Egan
Size of urban development	30.000	30.000	5.000-30.000?
Population of countryside	Scattered collective farms	Scattered private farms and facilities	Focus only on urban part, not on countryside
Private property	None	Land: no Other commodities: yes	No restrictions in private property
Democracy	Elected leaders of town and country	Local government with elected leaders	Current democratic administration system
Main planning targets	Equality Health	Health Environmental friendliness Public participation	Sustainability: Environmental friendliness Local jobs and services, well designed and built housing
Feasibility	Not in those days (*Utopia* means 'Nowhereland')	Difficult, but not impossible (2 model Garden Cities realised)	Possible
Interactive planning	No	Yes: via lobby groups, influencing professionals within the town administration	Yes: local people are included in decision-making processes

Conclusions

(1) Every model is typical for the civic society in which the author lived: More's model was an implicit critique on the political and economic situation of his time, which caused poverty for many people; Howards focus was on healthy cities, due to the bad hygienic situation in the cities of his time; Egan's focus is on sustainability, which is an important issue in current society.

(2) The most ancient model (Utopia) is the most radical, as private property is concerned. All the land, buildings and goods are commonly owned. This would bring about the highest possible equality. The Garden City model is less radical: only the

land is collectively owned. De Egan model is conventional in this matter: it does not propose collectivisation at all.

(3) The Egan model is the most explicit about the planning targets for a sustainable community. It could be used as a starting point. Combination with the Garden City planning targets is possible and useful, e.g. concerning the health items. The Garden City model is more explicit about the way public participation could be organised in a project for a sustainable community than the Egan model.

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