

**Mots clés**

Garden city

Mexico

model

dissemination

urban planning

project

diffuse urbanization

utopia

transect

When Ebenezer Howard imagines his *Garden City*, he is looking for a response to what his contemporaries in the second half of the 19th century considered an “urban crises without precedence”. The big cities are overpopulated and force the working classes to live in disastrous conditions. Land speculation in the urban periphery races out of control. Howard’s invention is based on the idea of the “people’s return to the land”.

The idea is to encourage city dwellers to migrate out to a network of interconnected satellite cities that propose the best of urban and country life, via the railroads. His work consists in part in the organization of this migration away from urban centers. In his new cities, all the land would be collectively owned. This collective ownership would inhibit speculative development and permit instead to reinvest in the community.

The architects Barry Parker and Raymond Unwin design the first *Garden City*. They create picturesque architecture that fits into its geography and context, with nature as a structuring element of the city’s organization.

The *Garden City* has an immense influence on the theory of urbanism, influencing urban planning in numerous Latin American countries, including Mexico. A group of architects and engineers – such as Carlos Contreras, Ignacio Bancalari, José Cuevas Pietrasanta – use the *Garden City* model to plan a post-revolutionary Mexico fitting with its principles. Inspired by the *Garden City Association*, they create the *National Association for the Planning of the Republic of Mexico*, which aims both to promote the model and to put it into practice at a national scale.

The government, intergovernmental organization – including UN-Habitat – and numerous *think tanks* all agree on a set of urban challenges faced by Mexico. In the end, these challenges differ only slightly from those which Ebenezer Howard sought to resolve. Still in the wake of the *Agrarian Reform* of the first part of the 20th century, individuals across Mexican society advocate for and deem necessary a new *Urban Reform*. This Thesis is based on the hypothesis that the *Garden City* could constitute a “reservoir of precedence” those implicated in this *Urban Reform* in Mexico could use as inspiration to push forward the transformation of their cities and territories. Although certain research accentuates the idea of the compact city and increasing the density of the existing urban fabric, this work defends the idea that it is possible to extend the city in a manner that is virtuous. Reflections inherited from the *Garden City* such as the *Neighborhood unit* or the more contemporary *New urbanism* are used to support the claim.

More than a century after Howard published his proposals, our cities seem to be confronted by very similar issues. The ideas of Howard have never been effectively practiced at a large scale, despite the great success of the first materialization of the ideas in the English city of Letchworth. In the face of a *status quo* that has lasted for decades, the author asks if it is not time to shake up our conception of the city as well as our current practices.

The demonstration of such a hypothesis is separated into three parts:

*First*, the research questions the theoretical notions of the model and its dissemination, thus defining the *Garden city* not only as a model of urban planning, but also as a social project that can propose new ways to imagine the cities and communities of tomorrow. This work posits that the reservoir of references found in the *Garden City* is constituted by a knowledge built both in theory and practice. The work traces the multiple examples of the *Garden City*, their principles and their materializations in order to define a set of social aspirations and spatial principles.

*Second*, the research studies the dissemination of the model on the Mexican context. This phase of the work analyses the conduits of dissemination, their most important materializations, and certain legal limitations faced by these cases. The research shows that to reference the *Garden City* in the Mexican context is not only reasonable but cognizant of the importance of the model in the history of Mexican city planning. The research hopes to contribute to the reservoir of references through the consideration of these Mexican examples.

*Third*, the work imagines how this reservoir of precedence can transform Mexican cities today. Here, the architectural and urban *project* is used as a means of inquiry capable of creating knowledge. It is an inquiry that can produce an understanding of a certain place, and then, imagine a prospective future for this place. This last part of the research is focused on the creation of possible scenarios. These possible or probable futures can be compared and can be used to help inform the planning process.

This last part of the research project elicits the creation of a methodology and the novel research tool of the *project*. The research questions if the pertinent transformation made of one space could be equally pertinent in another? Rather than relying on an existing site as the locus of exploration of the various scenarios, this research fabricates an urban environment constructed of elements typical of Mexican cities in which to set the experiment. This process necessitates the observation of multiple Mexican cities and the identification of generalities and typical traits. The research thus creates a site that does not exist – *ou topos* – that combines these characteristics. This site is used both as an illustration of the complexities of these urban environments and as a context for the experimentation of the proposed transformations – notably through the process of drawing.