6. Theory of Urban Planning

6.1. Introduction
The pioneer thinkers in Urban Planning, from 1880 to 1945, were divided into two groups:
- The Anglo-American group
- The Continental European group

The background of the two groups of thinkers has been quite different. The cities began to spread out after 1860: first the middle class and then the working class began to move out of the congested inner rings of cities into single family homes with individual gardens, built at densities of 10 to 12 houses per acre.

About the same time in most American cities, the arrivals of national groups such as Greeks, Russians, poles, Jews, Italians, etc crowded together in ethnic groups in the inner areas of cities like New York, Boston and Chicago.

By the 1920s and 1930s there was a rapid growth of single family housing around all American cities, served by public transport and then by the private car. This was a tradition which by large writers and thinkers in both Britain and United States accepted as the starting point.

6.2. The Anglo-American Tradition
a. Howard
b. Unwin and Parker
c. Perry, Stein and Tripp
d. Geddes and Abercrombie
e. F. L. Wright

a. Howard
The first most influential, of all the thinkers in the Anglo-American group is Ebenezer Howard (1850-1928). His book the Garden cities of tomorrow is the most important book in the history of urban planning. This book is packed with details of how the new garden cities were to be built. The famous diagram of the three magnets showed in fact is an extremely compressed and brilliant statement of planning objectives.

Ebenezer Howard’s Three Magnets
The celebrated diagram from Garden Cities of Tomorrow (1898) setting out the advantages and disadvantages of town and country life.

Howard was saying that both the existing cities and country side had an indissoluble mixture of advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of the city were the opportunities it offered in the form of accessibility to jobs and to urban services of all kinds; the disadvantages all be summed up in the poor resulting natural environment. Conversely the country side offered an excellent environment but virtually no opportunities of any sort.
Against this background Howard argued that a new type of settlement – Town – Country or Garden City could uniquely combine all the advantages of the town by way of accessibility, and all the advantages of the country by way of environment, without any disadvantages of either.

The new town so created would be deliberately outside normal commuter range of the old city. It would be fairly small (30,000 population) and it would be surrounded by a large belt, easily accessible to everyone.

**Howard’s Social City**

Howard advised that the town would be established in 6000 acres out of which 5000 acres would be left as green belt and the town itself occupying the remainder.

Two important points were stressed by Howard, the first is that, he was advocating quite a high residential density for his new towns and the second is that he did not advocate small isolated new towns. His notion was that would grow by cellular addition into a multi-centered agglomeration of towns, set against a background of open country. Howard called this polycentric settlement the Social City.

**b. Unwin and Parker**

Between 1900 and 1940 many of Howard’s ideas were developed by his faithful followers. The two architects who designed the first garden city, Letchworth, Raymond Unwin and his young assistant Barry Parker, later went on to build Hampstead Garden Suburb in north-west London.

Together Unwin and Parker developed some important modifications of the original Ebenezer Howard idea. Unwin argued that housing should be developed at lower densities. The need for public open space was related to the number of people. He recommended a net density of 12 houses to the acre. This standard was accepted in the important official report of Tudor Walters on 1918: Wythenshawe was built in 1920-1930s with density.

Both Unwin and Parker argued for the Howard principle of generous green belts around the new communities. Parker argued that the background of open space between cities should be occupied by parkways, giving easy interconnections between them. At Wythenshawe, Parker employed yet another notion: the idea of dividing the town into clearly articulated neighbourhood units. The ground plan of Wythenshawe shows the influence of this idea.

**c. Perry, Stein and Tripp**

The origin of the *neighbourhood* – unit idea is that certain everyday services are to be provided for groups of the community (housewives and children) who cannot or do not wish to travel very far should be provided at an accessible central place for a fairly
small local community, within the walking distance of all homes in that community.

**The neighbourhood unit**

This idea was taken much further during the preparation of the New York regional plan in the 1920s. One contributor to this plan, Clarence Perry developed the idea of the *neighbourhood* unit as a piece of social engineering, which would help people achieve a sense of identity with the community and with the space.

Meanwhile a close associate of Perry, Clarence Stein, an architect-Planner working in the New York region – had taken the neighbourhood concept further. He grasped the principle that in local residential areas the pedestrian routes used by the housewives and children should be segregated from the routes used by cars. He applied this idea by developing a separate system of pedestrian ways, reached from the back doors of the houses, which pass through communal open space area between the houses, and then cross under the vehicle streets. The vehicle streets intern designed according to the hierarchical principle.

In 1942 an imaginative Assistant Commissioner of Police (traffic) at London's Scotland Yard called H. Alker Tripp, published a slim book called *Town Planning and Traffic*. Tripp argued for a hierarchy of roads in which main arterial or sub-arterial roads were sharply segregated from the local streets, with only occasional access, and also free of direct frontage development.

These high capacity free-flow highways would define large blocks of the city, each of which would have its own shops and local services. Tripp illustrated his idea graphically in his book by applying it to an outworn (heavily bombed) section of London’s east end.

**d. Geddes and Abercrombie**

Abercrombie’s most notable contributions to Anglo – American planning theory and practice were made in extending city planning to a wider scale: the scale which embraced the city and the whole region around it in a single planning exercise.

Geddes’s contribution to planning was to base it firmly on the study of reality: the close analysis of settlement patterns and local economic environment. Geddes’s contribution was to put the flesh of reality on the bare bones of the regional idea: human geography was to provide the basis of planning. From this came Geddes’s working...
method, which became part of the standard sequence of planning: survey of the region, its characteristics and trends, followed by analysis of the survey, followed only then by the actual plan. Geddes, more than anyone gave planning, a logical structure

**e. F. L. Wright**

Wright based his thinking on a social premise: that it was desirable to preserve the sort of independent rural life of the homesteaders he knew in Wisconsin around 1890s. To this he added the realization, based on the early spread of the motor car among the farmers of North America, that mass car use would allow cities to spread widely into the countryside.

With the car and with cheap electric current everywhere, Wright argued, the old need for activities to concentrate in cities had ended: dispersion, not only of homes but also of jobs, would be the future role. He proposed to accept this and to encourage it by developing a completely dispersed – though planned – low density urban spread, which he called ‘Broadacre City’.

In fact, Wright’s Broadacre City proved to be an uncannily accurate picture of the typical settlement form of North America after the Second World War.

**6.3. The European Tradition**

Planning as a tradition in Europe goes back to the Ancient Greeks. In the nineteenth century it produced such celebrated designs as the reconstruction of Paris in 1890s, which imposed a new pattern of broad boulevards and great parks on the previous street pattern. The new ideas transformed town planning into city and regional planning by the visionaries such as:

- **a. Soria Y Mata**
- **b. Garnier and May**
- **c. Le Corbusier**

**a. Soria Y Mata**

The first representative of the European tradition was the Spanish engineer Soria Y Mata for the importance of one basic idea. In 1882 he proposed to develop a linear city, to be developed along an axis of high-speed, high intensity transport from an existing city. His argument was that under the influence of new forms of mass transport, cities were tending to assume such a linear form as they grew.

The idea has always enjoyed some popularity among the planners on the grounds that it has some good qualities. It does
correspond to exploit costly investments in new lines of rapid communication, whether these are nineteenth century railways or twentieth century motorways. And it does give easy access to the nearby open countryside.

Furthermore, it can respond automatically to the need for further growth, by simple addition at the far end; it does not need to operate through restrictive green belts, as Howard’s finite garden has to.

b. Garnier and May

Tony Garnier an architect working in the city of Lyon produced a design for an industrial city (Cite’ Industrielle). This like Howard’s garden city was to be self-contained new settlement with its own industries and housing close by.

The Cite’ Industrielle was never built, and though garden cities were built around Paris during the 1920s and 1930s most of them contained a high proportion of apartment blocks, and were remarkable mainly for their freer use of open space in the form of squares and public parks, yet even this they were congested and unhealthy of the working class housing at that time.

c. Le Corbusier

The Swiss born architect stands as one of the creators of the modern movement in Architecture. His most outstanding contribution as a thinker and writer was as an urban planner on the grand scale.

He produced remarkable designs for city reconstructions and for new settlements both in France and across the world. The most notable are his Unite’ d’ Habituation at Marseilles in France (1946-52) and his project for the capital city of the Punjab at Chandigarh (1950-57) in India.

The Radiant City

Le Corbusier developed this concept during the 1920s and 1930s the idea of a city with very high local concentrations of population in tall buildings, which would allow most of the ground space to be left open. His idea proved very influential for a whole generation of planners after the Second World War.

Ariel photograph of Roehampton, the practical application of Le Corbusier’s ideas after the Second World War, by the architects of the old London county council in their celebrated Alto West estate in south-west London (late 1950s)

Reference Books:

1. Urban Planning
   By Anthony J. Catannese & James C. Snyder
   McGraw Hill Book Company

2. Handbook on Urban Planning
   By WM. H. Claire
   Van Nostrand Reinhold Company
   ISBN: 0-442-21563-0