

**Between Tradition and Innovation:  
Balancing Architectural and Societal Heritage Through Conscious  
Stewardship of Garden Cities Since 1903.**

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## **Abstract**

Letchworth Garden City, England, and the Falkenberg Estate in Berlin, Germany are two of the most influential relics of the Garden City Movement. Both have achieved heritage status for their impact in the field of urban planning, having offered logical and humanitarian solutions to the smoggy and overcrowded living conditions of the late 19th century caused by rapid, uncontrolled growth and densification of cities during the First and Second Industrial Revolutions. This heritage status restricts aesthetic and structural modification of the built environment with the goal of preserving the historic identity of the sites. Although deserving of historical preservation and recognition, Letchworth and Falkenberg continue to face the challenge of providing housing to future generations of residents. This paper argues that the monumentalization of the Garden City Movement heightens the tension between tradition (marked by static architectural preservation) and innovation (serving the evolving needs of the residents) at Letchworth Garden City and the Falkenberg Estate; it does so using a Rieglian understanding of monument preservation and a thematic analysis of the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892, the two landowning organizations responsible for the stewardship and heritage preservation practices at each site. Using historical and contemporary primary and secondary sources and expert interviews, I show that both organizations resist the oppositional forces of tradition and innovation by bringing them into conversation with each other through new applications of the garden city model.

## Introduction

Urban planning is a field of constant progress, with planning practices developing over time to keep pace with the societal needs of any given era. This progress is often marked by iconic movements known for their revolutionary or experimental ideologies that transform the built environment and influence the ways in which people interact with their physical, social, and political surroundings. This paper recognizes the role of urban planning movements in producing these distinct developments and defines them by their ability to identify the specific problems of their era (e.g. housing, environment, economy) and produce innovative solutions that challenge common planning norms. These solutions consist not only of a set of physical developments and alterations to the built environment but also a theoretical framework that is placed into the historical canon and iterated upon to inform new movements and planning practices.

Although the Garden City Movement has certainly earned its title, its legacy in the field of urban planning has its shortcomings. Ebenezer Howard, progenitor and leader of the movement, is a household name among urbanists, yet his plans were only partially realized and his theory has historically been misinterpreted or cast aside as unrealistically idyllic.<sup>1</sup> Howard conceptualized the garden city as a response to the rapid exodus of people from the countryside to cities and the poor living conditions associated with crowded city life during the Second Industrial Revolution. His resulting garden city theory imagined a network of central cities and connected satellite towns with a revenue capture model that reinvested its profits into the maintenance and improvement of each city and satellite unit, rather than having profits go largely to speculative investors.

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<sup>1</sup> F. J. Osborn, Preface to *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1965), 9.



Today, the Garden City Institute recognizes 24 garden cities globally, with at least one on every continent.<sup>2</sup> While the global reach of the Garden City Movement is undeniable, this is nowhere near the connected network of cities that Howard imagined, and today these scattered garden cities face the challenge of representing the movement's principles despite being fragments of the contiguous network that Howard imagined. Further still, the movement has been appropriated by speculative planners who hope to attract residents with the promise of a populous town full of green space but who, according to F.J. Osborn in his preface to Howard's *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, "used [the term 'garden city'] persistently in a sense entirely different from, indeed opposed to, the author's definition,"<sup>3</sup> often simply calling a suburb a 'garden city' to evoke the feeling of sprawling open space separate from the density of a city.

This paper investigates the complex challenges that two garden city sites, Letchworth Garden City and Berlin's Gartenstadt Falkenberg, face as lasting monuments to the original garden city ideal. I begin by introducing Alois Riegl's *Writings on Monument Preservation* as a vital framework for my argument. This framework attributes value to Letchworth and Falkenberg through their influence as sites of urban change in the early twentieth century and designates them as monuments to the Garden City Movement that are worth preserving. This is followed by a historical account of the origins of the Garden City Movement and the development of Letchworth as the world's first garden city. I then trace the movement's arrival in Germany and its influence on the housing reform cooperatives that were becoming active in the early 1900s.

The unique characteristics of the Garden City Movement, as seen through Riegl's *Writings on Monument Preservation*, allow me to investigate a broader urban planning

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<sup>2</sup> "Global Garden Cities," International Garden Cities Institute, accessed April 25, 2024. <https://www.gardencitiesinstitute.com/resources/global-garden-cities>.

NOTE: This list does not include Gartenstadt Falkenberg, one of the two sites analyzed in this paper, likely due to the fact that Falkenberg is not its own municipality and cannot be considered a complete 'city' like the others in this list.

<sup>3</sup> F.J. Osborn. Preface to *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. 9.

phenomenon in which the innovative nature of influential planning movements establishes new values that inform future urban planning and, over time, become recognized as fundamental, traditional values of the movement. This process creates tension between the dynamic and revolutionary origins of the movement and the desire to monumentalize its success by freezing it in a form that is meant to represent the movement's 'true' identity. I argue that the monumental identity is in keeping with a preservationist conception of 'place' in which architecture is the only factor through which historical value is produced, while social and cultural history is ignored or undervalued.

It is this tension that the landowning organizations in charge of the preservation and stewardship of garden city sites must grapple with as they seek to preserve their respective histories while still providing high-quality housing to future generations of residents. My work acknowledges the necessity of historical preservation at these sites which, as rare physical examples of garden cities, stand as monuments to and bastions of the movement's success. However, I argue that such monumentalization is also restrictive, as it sees the 'original' built environment at both sites as the ultimate representation of the Garden City Movement. By only recognizing the physical relic of a largely ideological and social movement, monumentalization not only leaves little room for the movement to develop into the present day, but it also leads to a slow deterioration of its ability to fulfill the original social goals that the movement set out to meet. This leaves those responsible for future planning at both Letchworth and Falkenberg with the task of bridging the gap between tradition and innovation and challenges them to find a synthesis of the two that sees the Garden City Movement as a model for the future rather than a monument to the past. This approach requires a different understanding of place that values dynamic social history as much as it values a static built environment.

## Background

### *Alois Riegl and the cult of monuments*

At the turn of the 20th century, art history was not yet a widely accepted field of study and there was little common understanding of how artworks and cultural artifacts should be preserved. However, this began to change in 1902, when an Austrian man by the name of Alois Riegl became editor of the “Announcements from the Imperial-Royal Central Commission for the Research and Preservation of Architectural Monuments.”<sup>4</sup> During his time with the commission, he produced what would come to be known as the “modern cult of monuments,”<sup>5</sup> which he pushed to be recognized by the Austrian government to give his theories of monument preservation “a chance of practical realization.”<sup>6</sup> Riegl understood monuments as “works from a human hand, established ... in order to keep certain human deeds or skills (or combinations thereof) in the consciousness of future generations.”<sup>7</sup> What differentiated a monument from a work of art, he argued, was its contextualization within art history, which removes its objectivity and gives it relative age, historical, remembrance, artistic, and use values that justify its preservation.<sup>8</sup>

Riegl was a staunch historicist, believing that “everything that once existed becomes an irreplaceable and immovable link in a developmental chain.”<sup>9</sup> As such, the artistic value of a Rieglian monument becomes inseparable from its context in the developmental chain, and the

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<sup>4</sup> “*Mitteilungen der k.k. Zentral-Kommission für Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und historischen Denkmale*”

<sup>5</sup> “*der Moderne Denkmalkultus.*”

<sup>6</sup> Alois Riegl and Ernst Bacher. *Kunstwerk oder Denkmal? Alois Riegls Schriften zur Denkmalpflege* (Wien: Böhlau, 1995), 55.

Original Text: “*um den ‘modernen Denkmalkultus’ auch eine Chance auf eine praktische Realisierung zu geben.*”

<sup>7</sup> “*Unter Denkmal im ältesten und ursprünglichsten Sinne versteht man ein Werk von Menschenhand, errichtet zu dem bestimmten Zwecke, um einzelne menschliche Taten oder Geschicke (oder Komplexe mehrerer solcher) im Bewußtsein der nachlebenden Generationen stets gegenwärtig und lebendig zu erhalten.*” In Riegl, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Riegl, 18.

<sup>9</sup> “*... und jedes einmal Gewesene das unersetzliche und unverrückbare Glied einer Entwicklungskette bildet.*” in Riegl, 55.

values attributed to one monument inform the development of the next. However, Riegl also noted other values that contribute to an artwork's value and justify its preservation as a monument beyond its historical context. Most important to the scope of this paper is the "desired remembrance value,"<sup>10</sup> which seeks to "take a developmental moment out of the past and present as clearly before our eyes as though it belonged in the present."<sup>11</sup> This value, Riegl argues, can only be produced in the moment a monument is created, and must be an intentional claim that the human deeds that the monument celebrates should "never be left in the past."<sup>12</sup>

Riegl's writings on the modern cult of monuments helped define the discipline of art history; they both argued the need for monument preservation<sup>13</sup> and proposed a set of laws for protecting monuments that have influenced preservation laws worldwide. As I hope to show throughout this paper, the tension between tradition and innovation at garden city sites can be understood through Riegl's framing of monuments; some preservation efforts in Letchworth and Falkenberg strive to maintain both sites as untouched monuments to the Garden City Movement, while others recognize the constant progress inherent in the urban planning field and seek to bring the Garden City Movement into the future.

### *The origin of the garden city*

The field of formal urban planning as we know it arose in the late 19th century, coinciding with massive social and economic upheaval in reaction to the Second Industrial Revolution and the coinciding mass migration to cities as workers thronged to claim industry jobs while employers sought to capitalize on new and rapidly expanding markets. City life had

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<sup>10</sup> "der gewollte Erinnerungswert."

<sup>11</sup> "einen entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Moment aus der Vergangenheit herauszugreifen und so deutlich vor unsere [sic] Augen hinstellen, als ob er der Gegenwart angehören würde." in Riegl, 80.

<sup>12</sup> "niemals zur Vergangenheit werden zu lassen." in Riegl, 80.

<sup>13</sup> "Denkmalpflege."

become a necessary part of the economies of industrialized European countries by the beginning of the 19th century, and despite the “foul air and murky sky” associated with industry work and the workers’ slums, the city was seen as the pinnacle of society and opportunity, producing an irresistible draw toward it that pulled people from the countryside in search of work.<sup>14</sup> In his book, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, later renamed *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, Ebenezer Howard lamented the rapid flow of workers into big cities that had neither the space nor the money to sustain them, as well as the equally rapid rate at which the population of rural England was declining.<sup>15</sup> With the acknowledgement that the countryside no longer provided enough pull to slow this massive urban migration, Ebenezer Howard posited the “Town-Country magnet,” shown in Figure 1, as a powerful middle ground, giving rise to the Garden City Movement.

The movement captured a diverse audience with a simple but meticulous planning ideology. By creating networks of industrialized cities and towns spaced out by agricultural and recreational green belts, Howard believed that the society and opportunity of the city could coexist with the beauty and health of the countryside. Additionally, he displayed a moral understanding of land value and its tendency to increase after development and implemented an economic structure to the garden city which placed a limit on the amount of money that investors could earn off of the town’s revenue. This prevented the movement from being absorbed by the profit-driven motives that created the poor living conditions Howard wanted to avoid and allowed for the profits made by land and rent value increments to be reinvested into the garden city to meet the needs and interests of the general population.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ebenezer Howard, *Garden Cities of To-Morrow* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 1965, 46.

<sup>15</sup> Howard, 42.

<sup>16</sup> Howard goes into great detail about how he imagined this revenue capture model functioning in *To-Morrow* ch. 2-5.



Figure 1. Ebenezer Howard's "Three Magnets"<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Howard, 46.

Howard's desire to draw out the best of both town and country living and combine them into a new urban form was not revolutionary by any means, but his ability to synthesize the inspiration he took from utopian urbanists of his time with a practicable plan was what led to the movement's wide reach. Osborn was adamant that

Howard... was not a political theorist, not a dreamer, but an inventor. The inventor proceeds by first conceiving of an idea of a possible new product or instrument, next by evolving a design on paper with patient thought for the adaptation of the structure for the conditions it has to fulfil, and finally by experimentation with models to test the design in practice.<sup>18</sup>

Howard's theory, while robust, understood that its physical application would require significant reworking depending on the site selected for a garden city.<sup>19</sup> This is best seen in the message he left beside his diagrams, stating "Plan must depend on site selected" or "Plan cannot be drawn until site selected," as seen in Figure 2.<sup>20</sup> By laying out a strong fundamental framework for what constituted a garden city and suggesting basic physical features that suggested a translation from theory to practice, Howard was able to produce a shared understanding of the garden city that was digestible to the general public. This allowed him to start the Garden City Association and the International Garden City Association,<sup>21</sup> sending his ideas worldwide and eventually securing him the funding to build the world's first garden city: Letchworth, England. Howard registered the First Garden City Ltd. as the company that would plan, construct, and then own Letchworth, following his proposed economic model.<sup>22</sup> After purchasing around 4,000 acres of land 30 miles north of London, First Garden City Ltd. began to turn Howard's conceptual diagrams into a reality, eventually producing a town of around 32,000 residents surrounded by an agricultural

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<sup>18</sup> F.J. Osborn. Preface to *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. 21.

<sup>19</sup> "No one was better aware than he that inventions change as they develop." F.J. Osborn. Preface to *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. 23.

<sup>20</sup> Howard, 53.

<sup>21</sup> F.J. Osborn. Preface to *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*. 12.

<sup>22</sup> C. B. Purdom. *The Garden City: A Study in the Development of a Modern Town*. (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1913), 31.

and recreational green belt, with designated industrial areas that ran along the rail line into London. The final town plan, shown in Figure 3, shows the extent to which Howard was willing to adapt his diagrams to a real location. While the town's physical layout is nowhere near the symmetrical, geometric diagrams he proposed, the final plan shows a practical application of the green belt and the separation of industrial areas into the northeast portion of the town.

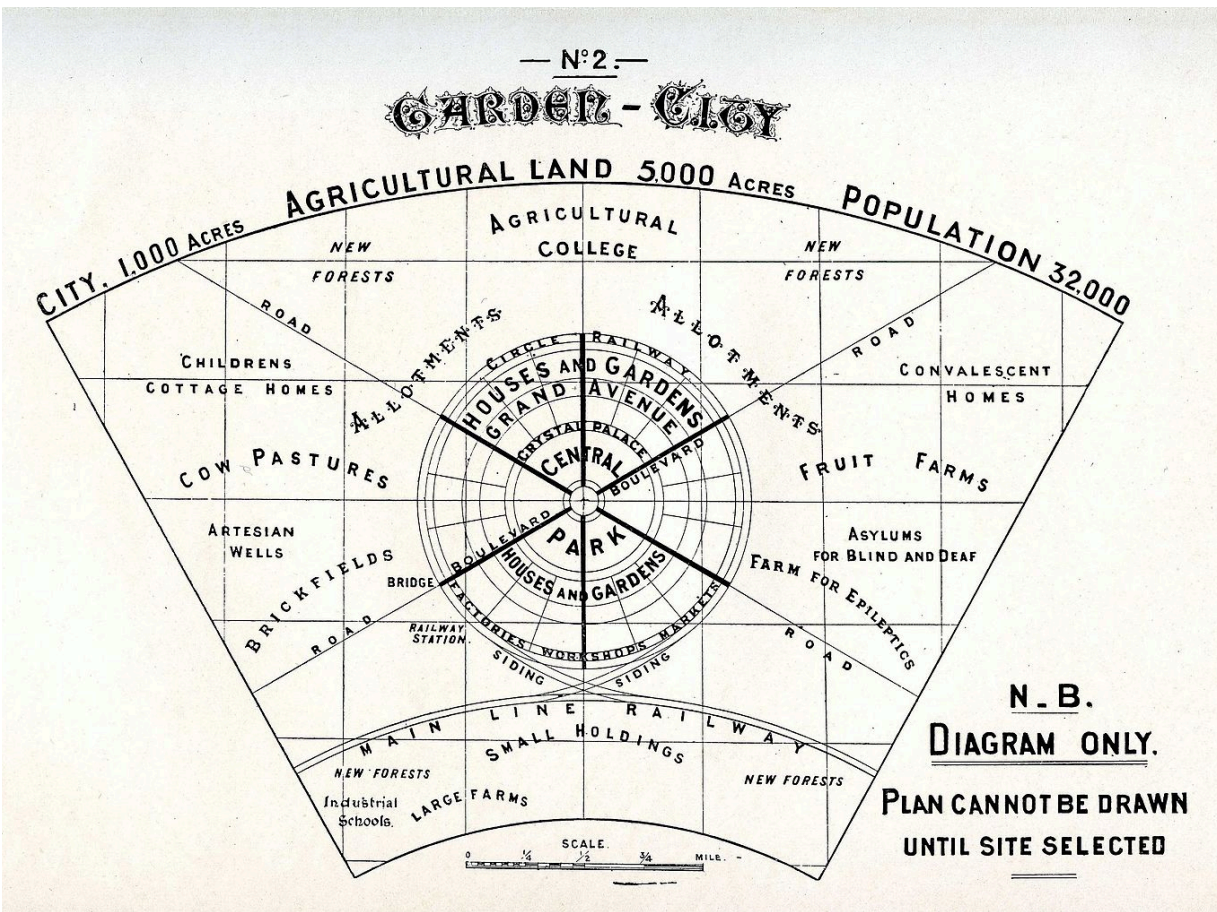


Figure 2. Howard's conceptual diagram for a garden city<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Howard 52.



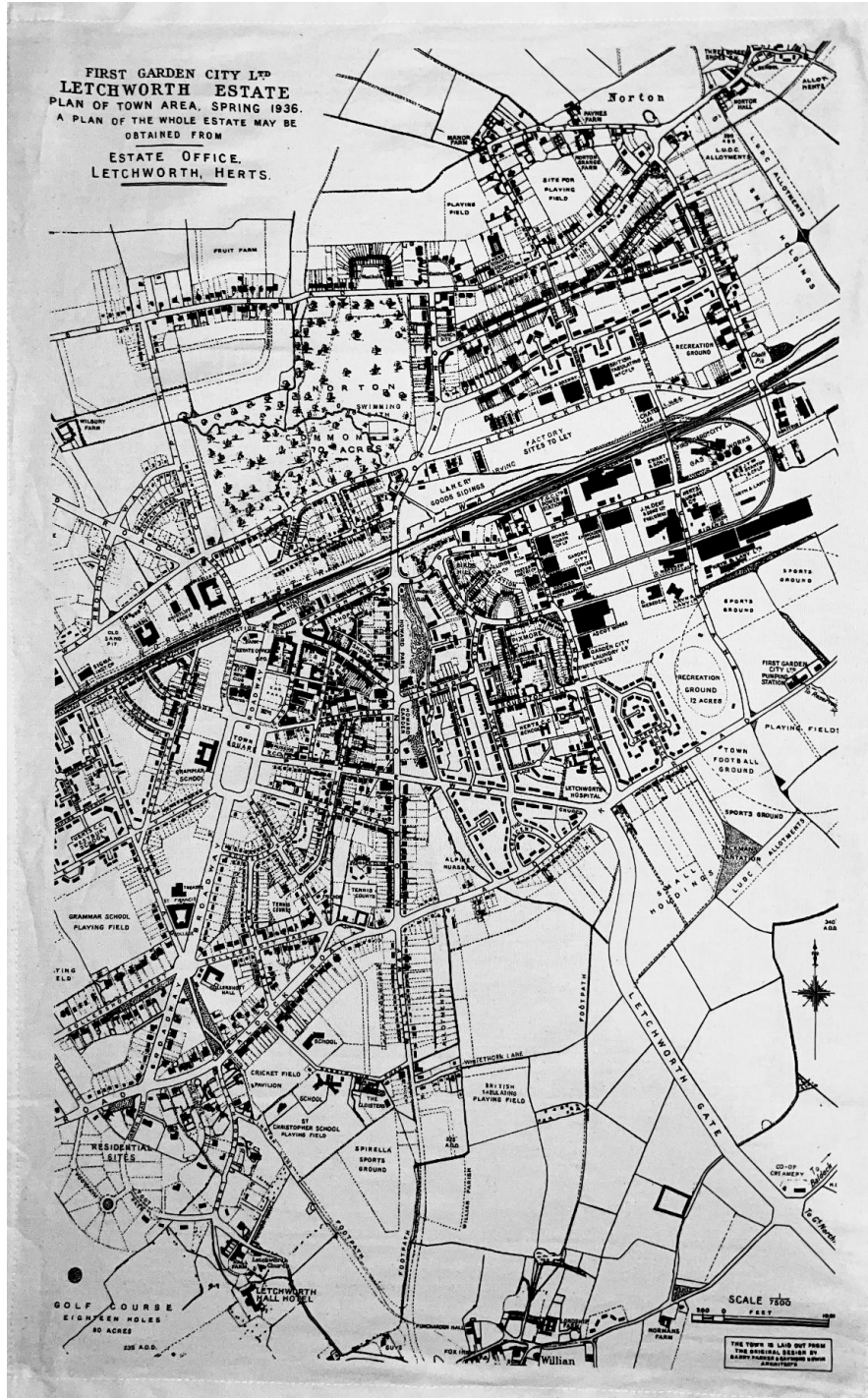


Figure 3. Letchworth “Plan of Town Area. Spring 1936.”<sup>24</sup>

This tea towel from the museum gift shop at The Museum at One Garden City shows the town’s layout three decades after the development began.

<sup>24</sup> Photo taken by the author, February 2, 2024.

*The movement catches on*

Around the time of Howard's famous publication *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, later renamed *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, Germany was experiencing many of the same problems as England. Between 1871 and 1919 Berlin's population quadrupled from 900,000 to just under 4 million. At the time German city planning was entirely left to the free market and private enterprise. This left the working class at the mercy of speculators who turned the center of Berlin into a swath of industrial tenements, derisively nicknamed "rental barracks,"<sup>25</sup> which were intended to house workers as cheaply as possible, often without regard for health and wellbeing.<sup>26</sup> Rent prices increased by 75% between 1880 and 1890 as more workers flooded into the city, and people were forced to sublease their apartments by the hour when they were not home to afford them.<sup>27</sup>

In 1902, inspired by Ebenezer Howard's writings on England's similar issues, the German Garden City Society<sup>28</sup> (DGG) was founded.<sup>29</sup> During this time various reform movements had arisen in search of solutions to the housing crisis, taking the form of housing and construction cooperatives that were soon abundant in Berlin. These cooperatives served as a way of combining the financial and social capital of like-minded people into powerful enough entities to challenge the oppressive real estate practices that had led to the "monstrosity of the rental barrack city."<sup>30</sup> The DGG was not itself a cooperative but was rather a self-described "propaganda organization" whose goal was to promote and encourage the building of garden cities, with the end goal of a "decentralization of industry, and with that a more even distribution

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<sup>25</sup> "Mietskaserne."

<sup>26</sup> Klaus Novy and Barbara von Neumann-Cosel. *Zwischen Tradition und Innovation: 100 Jahre Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892*. Edition Hentrich, 1992, 9.

<sup>27</sup> Novy, 9.

<sup>28</sup> "Deutsche Gartenstadtgesellschaft."

<sup>29</sup> Novy, 58.

<sup>30</sup> "Ungeheuerlichkeit der Mietskasernenstadt." In Novy, 9.

of industrial life across the country.”<sup>31</sup> As such, although the DGG’s ideology stayed true to Ebenezer Howard’s work, the practical application of the Garden City Movement in Germany took on its own unique form as the DGG’s (and Howard’s) principles began to influence the cooperatives’ projects.

This distinct branch of the Garden City Movement consisted almost entirely of residential “settlements”<sup>32</sup> rather than self-sufficient towns. Additionally, Berlin’s cooperative renting model served as a proxy for the reinvestment model posed by Howard for his garden cities, as it was introduced to prevent speculation, promote affordability, and reduce class divides among residents.<sup>33</sup> Development at the scale of the settlement was utilized by other planning and architectural movements that existed alongside the Garden City Movement, including that of early architectural modernism (the “New Building”<sup>34</sup> movement), as each new project attempted to showcase how new urban forms could function at the community scale. The executives of Berlin’s housing reform cooperatives were representatives of wide-ranging social movements, meaning that the projects they supported often borrowed from multiple social, planning, and architectural ideologies.

Bruno Taut, the architect who designed Gartenstadt Falkenberg on his way to building over 10,000 housing units in Berlin, was one of the champions of the German Garden City Movement and is recognized as one of the most influential modernist architects of the 20th century.<sup>35</sup> The goal of his urban planning philosophy was fundamentally simple: “a good

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<sup>31</sup> “*Propagandagesellschaft...eine Dezentralisation der Industrie und damit eine gleichmässige Verteilung des Gewerbelebens über das Land.*” Bernhard Kampffmeyer, “Von der Kleinstadt zur Gartenstadt,” *Flugschrift / Deutsche Gartenstadt-Gesellschaft; 11*, Maurer & Dimmick, 1908, 13.

<sup>32</sup> “*Siedlungen.*”

<sup>33</sup> Lars Klaaßen, “Welterbesiedlungen Gartenstadt Falkenberg, Schillerpark-Siedlung.” *Die neuen Architekturführer* 166 no. 1. (May 2011), Berlin: Stadtwandel-Verl. Fuhrhop, 38.

<sup>34</sup> “*Das neue Bauen.*”

<sup>35</sup> Kurt Junghans, “Preface,” in *Bruno Taut: Master of Colourful Architecture in Berlin = Meister Des Farbigen Bauens in Berlin*, ed. Winfried Brenne, (Berlin: Braun, 2008), 7.

home.”<sup>36</sup> Taut believed that “architecture should correspond to human needs,”<sup>37</sup> and applied this belief to both his practical works and his utopian ideals, the latter of which culminated in his famous works, *The Earth, a Good Home* and *Alpine Architecture*.<sup>38</sup> Both books consist of a collection of drawings depicting large, geometric crystalline structures, often colorful, suspended above steep valleys or rising from mountain peaks, as Figure 4 shows. Otto Schily writes about Taut’s belief in “the spiritual-moral effects of architecture,”<sup>39</sup> citing the architect’s reaction to the death and destruction of World War I as a major influence on his idea of a return to nature. For Taut, the utopia of alpine architecture embodied the best of human morality, as it imagined a world in which the technological prowess required to achieve the “industrial destructiveness”<sup>40</sup> of World War I was harnessed and used to produce new architectural forms that embodied true morals, reuniting the Earth as a “good home.” Despite the heavily stylized composition of many of his drawings and the idyllic, utopian world they imagine, some of Taut’s works suggest what a practical application of his ideology might look like, and show a clear depiction of the synthesis of town and country which shares many similarities with Ebenezer Howard’s ring-shaped concept drawings for English garden cities, as seen in Figure 5.

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<sup>36</sup> “*Eine gute Wohnung.*” Translation note: The English translation of ‘*Wohnung*’ as ‘apartment’ is used in this text and throughout many other translations of Taut’s works, but its application spans a much larger range of residential units. For this paper I translate it as ‘home’ or ‘housing unit,’ the former being used to emphasize the connotation of the positive resident/residence dynamic Taut strove to produce, and the latter being used in a more technical sense (above, “10,000 housing units”).

<sup>37</sup> Otto Schily, “The Earth a Good Apartment,” in *Bruno Taut: Master of Colourful Architecture in Berlin = Meister Des Farbigen Bauens in Berlin*, ed. Winfried Brenne, (Berlin: Braun, 2008), 11.

<sup>38</sup> “*Die Erde - Eine gute Wohnung*” and “*Alpine Architektur.*”

<sup>39</sup> Schily, “The Earth”, 11.

<sup>40</sup> “*Industrielle Zerstörungskräfte.*” In Schily, 10.



Figure 4. “Firms in Ice and Snow” (*Alpine Architecture*)<sup>41</sup>

**Inscriptions:**

**Lower left, within depiction:** “SNOW / GLACIER / GLASS”

**Lower right, within depiction:** “Firms / in eternal ice / and snow — /built over and decor- / ated with / peripheral structures, sur- / faces and blocks / of colored glass / ~mountain blossoms~”

**Below depiction:** “The execution would certainly be incredibly difficult and full of sacrifices, but not impossible. ‘One so seldom / demands the impossible of people’” (Goethe)<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Bruno Taut, and Matthias Schirren. *Bruno Taut: Alpine Architektur: Eine Utopie = a Utopia*. (Munich ; New York: Prestel), 2004, 55.

<sup>42</sup> Taut and Schirren, 54. Note: *The English version of the inscriptions appears as it was translated by John Gabriel in Schirren’s book (bold added myself for legibility).*





Figure 5. Untitled (*The Earth, a good home*)<sup>43</sup>

**Description:** the ruins of a city lie in a heap at the top of the image. Among the wreckage are two inscriptions: “Let them fall apart, the built disgraces!” and “Stone houses make stone hearts.” Below the ruins stands a network of small towns shaped like flowers, each with a ‘city crown’<sup>44</sup> at its center. At the bottom of the page is another inscription: “Now our Earth is blooming”

<sup>43</sup> Bruno Taut. *Die Auflösung Der Städte ; Oder, Die Erde Eine Gute Wohnung ; Oder Auch: Der Weg Zur Alpenen Architektur ; in 30 Zeichnungen* (Hagen in West: Folkwang, 1920), 1.

<sup>44</sup> “Stadtkrone.”

### *Garden city ownership...*

The planning theories championed by Howard and Taut were dependent on new forms of land ownership that are just as important to the success of the Garden City Movement as the synthesis of town and country. Letchworth's land value capture model and the similarly organized cooperative model seen in Falkenberg each required the presence of a land-owning organization which, beyond simply acting as a landlord, represented a united social reform effort that implemented and protected the principles of their respective movements. These organizations have since grown and aged with their sites, following along as they developed from dynamic beginnings into the matured, historic monuments that exist today. As a result, these organizations own both the past and the future of the Garden City Movement.

### *... in Letchworth*

On September 1, 1903, First Garden City Ltd. was registered as the company that would build Letchworth and ultimately own and rent out the 3800 acres of land that it purchased to build the world's first garden city. From the beginning, the company prospectus was clear that the plan for Letchworth would be carried out "on the lines suggested by Mr. Ebenezer Howard in his book entitled *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, with any necessary modifications."<sup>45</sup> In a 1904 memorandum, the company directors stated,

The Garden City Company, in proposing to found a new town for industrial and residential purposes, is not entering into a land speculation; it does not desire to reap for itself the profit which will accrue from the conversion of agricultural land into building land, and from mere building land into the site of a well-developed town, and it has carefully deprived itself and its successors of the power to do so. The articles of association of the company provide that all profits beyond a cumulative dividend of 5 per cent., which is regarded as a fair return to the shareholders, shall be used for the benefit

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<sup>45</sup> Purdom, 33.

of the town and its inhabitants. *As the profit, therefore, cannot be retained by the company, it will go to the tenants in one way or another.*<sup>46</sup> (Emphasis in original)

This commitment to Howard's economic model reinforced the idea that the overcrowding of cities was a genuine societal problem rather than an opportunity to capitalize on people's desire to escape the poor living conditions of industrial cities. Similarly, the memorandum clarified that *"as the greater part of this increased value is due to the social activities of the people as a whole (i.e., in their collective capacity) it is in this capacity that they should receive the benefit, and not as private individuals"*<sup>47</sup>(emphasis in original). First Garden City Ltd. owned Letchworth in its entirety, which enabled it to implement the land capture model and control the reinvestment of profits to the town in keeping with the garden city values imagined by Howard.

The company's commitment to garden city values did not go unchallenged. After World War II, Britain experienced a period of rebuilding that was spearheaded by the 1946 New Towns Act and the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act, which set up development corporations that built new towns and "restrict the growth of large cities."<sup>48</sup> After this period of public sector rebuilding, planning was denationalized, and in 1959 "open market values were restored as the basis of all transactions and private sector development flourished."<sup>49</sup> Letchworth was already well ahead of many other private planning projects and had garnered considerable publicity in its first 50 years, and over time investors who had been closely monitoring First Garden City Ltd. noticed the company stray from the garden city ideal, submitting applications to develop the areas designated as protected green belts. In 1960, a company by the name of Hotel York Limited completed a takeover of First Garden City Ltd and attempted to auction off some of Letchworth's

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<sup>46</sup> Purdom, 47.

<sup>47</sup> Purdom, 47.

<sup>48</sup> "New Towns," UK Parliament, accessed April 3, 2024, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/towncountry/towns/overview/newtowns/>.

<sup>49</sup> Mervyn Miller, "Letchworth Garden City Eighty Years On," *Built Environment* 9, no. 3/4 (1983): 174.



land.<sup>50</sup> This caused outrage among those who were still committed to Ebenezer Howard's principles, resulting in an effort between the Letchworth Urban District Council and the Town and Country Planning Association (previously named the Garden City Association) to reclaim Letchworth. In 1962, the Letchworth Garden City Corporation Bill created an eponymous public sector corporation that was handed the town's assets.

Despite reinforcing garden city principles, the Letchworth Garden City Corporation, hereafter "the Corporation" was only able to maintain control over the garden city as landlords for five years, as the Leasehold Reform Act of 1967 introduced the right for tenants to purchase residential properties from their landlords. This act threatened the ownership model set by Howard, in which the First Garden City Ltd. owned the estate in its entirety, and allowed for tenants who purchased their land from the corporation to alter their properties in ways that were not in keeping with garden city principles. In reaction to this, the Corporation implemented a set of architectural preservation guidelines, called the Scheme of Management, by which all tenants who had purchased their residential properties from the Corporation had to abide.<sup>51</sup> The aim of the Scheme was "to preserve the appearance and character of Letchworth's unique environment as the world's first Garden City and to ensure houses are in harmony with its original design and character."<sup>52</sup> This gave the Letchworth Garden City Corporation the ability, not only to protect the historic architecture of the town's older buildings but to maintain the density of houses and the landscaping by preventing the division of plots of land to accommodate more units than were originally there.<sup>53</sup> In 1974, government reorganization placed Letchworth in the North

Hertfordshire District Council area, whose government moved to reaffirm the historical

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<sup>50</sup> Miller, 174.

<sup>51</sup> John Lewis, "Preserving and Maintaining the Concept of Letchworth Garden City" in *Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 161.

<sup>52</sup> "Altering Your Home," Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, accessed April 28, 2024. <https://www.leitchworth.com/your-home/altering-your-home>.

<sup>53</sup> Lewis, 162.

importance of the Garden City Movement by designating the town as a conservation area. The council describes conservation areas as being “of ‘special’ architectural or historic importance, with a character or appearance to be preserved or enhanced. Conservation areas are an important part of our heritage and each one is unique and irreplaceable.”<sup>54</sup> This designation is less restrictive than the Scheme of Management, as it largely seeks to identify and label the defining characteristics of the Garden City Movement and Letchworth’s unique architectural identity, but it encourages projects that preserve the built environment within designated conservation areas.

In 1995 the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation Act was passed, which dissolved the Letchworth Garden City Corporation and established the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. This change was less drastic than the others and did not pose as much of a challenge to the way the garden city was stewarded. Rather, as Lord Stewartby claimed in Parliament as he brought the bill forward,

The reason for the present Bill before your Lordships' House is a recognition that the present status of [the] Letchworth[] Garden City Corporation as a public sector body is anomalous. It arises from two factors. The first is that in order to guarantee the finances of the garden city corporation in its earliest stages, a guarantee was provided for recourse to Hertfordshire County Council in case the corporation fell short of funds. The second reason is that the Secretary of State currently appoints the majority of the corporation's board members, but he plays no part in the corporation's affairs and for many years the corporation has been in no way dependent upon public funds. Therefore the designation of the corporation as a public sector body is no longer appropriate. In effect Letchworth Garden City is already a charitable foundation and the purpose of this Bill is to convert it into one by law.<sup>55</sup>

The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, hereafter “the Foundation,” is the organization that exists today and is responsible for allocating the profits generated by

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<sup>54</sup> “Letchworth Conservation Area,” North Herts Council, last modified January 9, 2020, <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/letchworth-conservation-area>.

<sup>55</sup> “Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation Bill,” UK Parliament Hansard, 8 February 1995, accessed April 3, 2024. <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1995/feb/08/letchworth-garden-city-heritage>.

Letchworth's land value "back into the community and landscape of Letchworth Garden City."<sup>56</sup>

The Foundation's governors are appointed in various ways: six are elected, Letchworth Garden City Clubs and Societies nominate 10, and the rest (currently 11) are appointed by a Board of Trustees composed of up to 13 selected governors.<sup>57</sup>

... *in Falkenberg*

While the largest challenges faced by Letchworth's various organizations leading up to the establishment of the Foundation came from Parliamentary acts, Gartenstadt Falkenberg was subject to the geopolitical upheaval of both World Wars and their aftermath. In 1892, the Berliner Spar- und Bauverein e.G.m.b.H. (BSBV)<sup>58</sup> was founded, bringing together a group of social reformers who wanted to push back against the state and societal forces repressing the working class.<sup>59</sup> The organization was founded upon a pioneering and experimental identity that brought together not just those interested in housing and architecture reform, but also economists, health experts, and social scientists into a "network of minds"<sup>60</sup> with the goal of "integrating the working class into bourgeois society and the Wilhelmine state."<sup>61</sup> However, housing reform was a massive part of the BSBV's mission, and in 1894 the organization began building its first settlement, Sickingenstraße. Almost a decade before the DGG was formed, Sickingenstraße was no garden city, but it served as an important touchstone for the economic feasibility of the newly

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<sup>56</sup> "Our History," Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Accessed February 17, 2024, <https://www.letchworth.com/who-we-are/our-history>.

<sup>57</sup> "Governance | Letchworth," Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation," Accessed April 3, 2024, <https://www.letchworth.com/who-we-are/governance>.

<sup>58</sup> "Berlin Savings and Construction Society."

<sup>59</sup> Novy, 14.

<sup>60</sup> "Das Netzwerk der Köpfe" in Novy, 19.

<sup>61</sup> Novy, 19.

formed cooperative's plans.<sup>62</sup> Through Sickingenstraße and other early projects, the BSBV learned to balance affordability and high living standards in its projects.

By the time the plan for Gartenstadt Falkenberg was conceptualized, the BSBV was already a thriving and influential organization within a network of other reform organizations around Germany and had begun construction on six settlements. This new project, however, would introduce Berlin to the Garden City Movement for the first time. Bruno Taut arrived as the consulting architect for the DGG and soon had a plan for "1,500 houses for 7,000 residents and diverse community facilities," each unique in color and providing each household with its own garden plot.<sup>63</sup> The settlement would be designed and built by the DGG before being placed under the ownership and administration of the BSBV. However, the outbreak of World War I brought the development of all unfinished settlements, including Falkenberg, to a halt, leaving only 90 units from Bruno Taut's 1913 plan. The colorful buildings, which stood in stark contrast to the bland style of Wilhelmine architecture, soon earned the settlement the nickname "Paintbox Estate."<sup>64</sup> Once used mockingly, this nickname has come to be used in praise of the estate's vibrant colors, as seen in Figure 6.

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<sup>62</sup> "Dieses Bauprojekt wurde zum ersten Prüfstein der jungen Genossenschaft." In Novy, 25.

<sup>63</sup> Novy, 60.

<sup>64</sup> "Tuschkastensiedlung."



Figure 6. The Paintbox Estate<sup>65</sup>

Bruno Taut believed in the importance of color in architecture, but due to the high costs associated with creating unique houses, he used a set number of identical design features in different ways, mixing and matching colors to ensure that no one house had the same design and color as another.

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<sup>65</sup> Photo taken by author, August 14, 2023.

After the war, high building prices and a lack of materials meant that many organizations like the BSBV could not afford to fund and build their own projects.<sup>66</sup> As a result, the planning and construction of many settlements during this time were undertaken by GEHAG, a complex and highly influential housing association that worked with cooperatives and municipalities alike and is responsible for the development of many of Berlin's UNESCO World Heritage sites. The BSBV struggled to make it through the period of post-war inflation and briefly experimented with decentralizing and letting their settlements manage themselves, but after a year they determined that they could not generate enough interest among residents to maintain independent leadership. As modernist housing movements began to take hold, however, the BSBV established a working relationship in which the cooperative was the contractor for new projects while GEHAG managed the construction, which helped get the cooperative back on its feet financially.<sup>67</sup>

This relationship would not last long, as the rise of national socialism put an end to the cultural diversity formerly championed by the New Building movement. Those in leadership positions for both small housing cooperatives like the BSBV and larger unions like GEHAG were ousted and replaced by Nazis, creating a uniform national network of Nazi housing control.<sup>68</sup> As a result, "ideological differences, formerly integrated into the cultural diversity of communal life, became barricades that tore families and generations apart."<sup>69</sup> Falkenberg, which had been known as a place of tolerance and diversity, became a place of intense political contention as some residents accepted Naziism while others were threatened and persecuted for not conforming. Despite the administrative takeover of the BSBV, the cooperative and its

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<sup>66</sup> Novy, 71.

<sup>67</sup> Novy, 75.

<sup>68</sup> Novy, 86.

<sup>69</sup> "*Weltanschauliche Differenzen, bisher in der kulturellen Vielfalt des Zusammenlebens eingebunden, wurden nun zu Barrikaden, trennten sogar Familien und Generationen,*" in Novy, 89.

members continued to exist, and in 1942 the cooperative celebrated its 50th anniversary by changing its name to the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892,<sup>70</sup> hereafter “the 1892.”<sup>71</sup>

After years of Nazi occupation, Gartenstadt Falkenberg found itself in East Berlin while the 1892 was in the West. The estate became the communal property of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1951 and was controlled by East Germany’s housing administration for the next four decades. During this time, however, the GDR respected Falkenberg’s history and placed it under heritage protection in 1963, on the 50th anniversary of its construction. Meanwhile, in West Germany, the 1892 and other cooperatives were given little chance to participate in the post-war rebuilding of Berlin. Instead, large architecture firms were brought in to build on a large scale, forsaking innovative design for efficient recovery from the damages of the war.<sup>72</sup> This stagnancy led many cooperatives to lose membership, with some members moving into the new developments. The 1892 spent this period taking small new development projects where it could and renovating its older settlements to stay in keeping with its promise of high-quality housing for its members.

In 1991, two years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the 1892 and Gartenstadt Falkenberg were reunited, sparking the beginning of a series of renovation projects to restore the estate to its colorful glory after decades of fading.<sup>73</sup> Today, the 1892 continues to rent properties using a cooperative ownership structure and is responsible for the preservation and maintenance of Falkenberg as a fine example of garden city-inspired modernist planning.

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<sup>70</sup> “*Berlin Building and Housing Cooperative of 1892.*”

<sup>71</sup> Both the 1892 and the Foundation are the abbreviations used by the organizations themselves, with the exception of “the 1892” being translated from German (“*die 1892*”).

<sup>72</sup> Novy, 103.

<sup>73</sup> Novy, 166.



## **Overview of research: conceptual framework**

That the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892 exist today is a testament to both organizations' deep histories and their commitment to continuing the legacies upon which they were founded. The innovation of an urban planning movement can only come into tension with the traditions of its past if it has lasted long enough for its history to carry cultural significance. By bringing Alois Riegl's cult of monuments into conversation with the urban planning movements, my research understands the tension between tradition and innovation as a phenomenon that may apply to all urban planning movements. Given the inherent dynamism of planning movements as catalysts for change, the desire to monumentalize the built environment in honor of movement is contradictory.

My research uses a thematic analysis of the Garden City Movement as a proxy for urban planning movements as a whole, as it has three key characteristics that make the movement an effective lens through which to understand this phenomenon:

- 1) The First and Second Industrial Revolutions created and exacerbated a specific set of problems that the Garden City Movement directly responded to.
- 2) Enough time has passed since the beginning of the movement to be able to study both its inception and its influence over the past century.
- 3) Letchworth and Falkenberg are examples of "tabula rasa" planning, meaning that both sites have been built from scratch on razed or empty estates, creating a built environment that ages and deteriorates uniformly, drastically emphasizing the tension between tradition and innovation as the housing stock ages.



The two sites also offer specific identities that allow for a deeper understanding of the tradition-innovation dynamic, as Letchworth stands as the first-ever garden city and is the closest to Howard's fundamental understanding of the garden city, while Falkenberg is the product of the Garden City Movement, the Modernist movement, and the wider housing reform movement in Germany in the early 1900s. However, it is the fact that both sites are stewarded by similar landowning organizations that allow for the most complete analysis of the movement, as the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892 are both responsible for grappling with tradition and innovation at their respective sites.

This paper addresses the following questions regarding the role of the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892 in the architectural and ideological preservation of Letchworth Garden City and Gartenstadt Falkenberg: In what way does the tension between static architectural preservation regulations and the evolving needs of the residents of both sites interfere with the organizations' approach to stewardship? What are the practical pressures that threaten sites built upon the Garden City Movement's theoretical model as they try to maintain and memorialize the movement's legacy? How do these pressures challenge the capacity of the Foundation and the 1892 to uphold alternative urban design practices in the face of dominant planning structures? These questions describe how the Garden City Movement and the organizational structure of the Foundation and the 1892 highlight the tension between tradition and innovation in Letchworth and Falkenberg.

I suggest that 'place' and cultural identity at Letchworth Garden City and Gartenstadt Falkenberg are produced similarly to monumentality—through the historic significance of the Garden City Movement—but that a place-based understanding of Letchworth and Falkenberg

gives value to the social history of the movement while a Rieglian approach favors the art historical value of the built environment. In this way, the physical preservation practices at both sites are a potential source of social stagnation.

This argument is based on the fact that both Letchworth and Falkenberg were designed and built from scratch to solve a set of problems specific to the era of their design—in this case the exodus of workers from the countryside to the city during the First and Second Industrial Revolutions and the unlivable conditions that greeted them upon their arrival in cities. By Rieglian logic, Letchworth and Falkenberg represent an important step forward in urban planning and are deserving of monumentalization. However, this designation does not prevent social needs from shifting beyond the physical bounds of the garden city. Today, industrial overcrowding is no longer a major issue in England or Germany. Instead, issues such as the inefficiency of suburban sprawl and the climate crisis have become the core concerns of 21st-century urban planning. If Letchworth and Falkenberg are to maintain high standards of living in a new era, why should they be preserved to match the standards required by the eras before it?

To answer this question I use a historical analysis of both sites, focusing on specific points in their histories in which either the organization or its respective site was politically, economically, or socially threatened, to contextualize the contemporary stewardship of Letchworth Garden City and Gartenstadt Falkenberg. This serves to build the argument that, as the Foundation and the 1892 continue to preserve the original built environment at these sites while adapting the garden city model to the present day, the rift between the physical and the social garden city grows, creating moments of conflict in which the organizations must decide between preservation and progress.

## Literature review

To provide sufficient contextual background to my data collection, I focus on three main bodies of literature. The first of these is a continuation of Riegl's cult of monuments that includes both Riegl's contemporaries and the UNESCO framework for preservation. The second body is a discussion of 'place' which seeks to understand how social, cultural, and economic factors create distinct, if individually defined, 'places.' Finally, the third body is a look toward the future of garden cities, including present-day applications of garden city theory and the current pressures surrounding housing in England and Germany. This allows for a contemporary analysis of the stewardship of Letchworth and Falkenberg and the efficacy of the steps taken by the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the 1892 to balance heritage regulations and progressive planning.

### *Monuments and preservation*

Riegl's cult of monuments inspired many of his contemporaries to apply his preservation theories to their own personal ideologies. One such man was Dr. Georg Gottfried Dehio, for whom monument preservation was an act of patriotism. He argued, "We do not preserve a monument because it is beautiful, but because it is a piece of our national Dasein" and claimed preservation to be an act of piety.<sup>74</sup> In the early years of organized art history, Dehio's interest in monument preservation indicated a desire to claim membership in a cultured society and gave reason to label the destruction of historic works "a sign of barbarism."<sup>75</sup> However, this high-society interest in historic preservation did not extend to all historic works just because of

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<sup>74</sup> Georg Dehio, *Denkmalschutz und Denkmalpflege im neunzehnten Jahrhundert: Rede zur Feier des Geburtstages Sr. Majestät des Kaisers gehalten in der Aula der Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität am 27. Jan. 1905*, (Strassburg: Heitz, 1905), 11.

Original Text: "Wir konservieren ein Denkmal nicht, weil wir es für schön halten, sondern weil es ein Stück unseres nationalen Daseins ist."

<sup>75</sup> "ein Zeichen von Barbarei," in Dehio, 8.

their advanced age. Riegl himself noted the necessity of destroying old housing to make way for rail lines in the Wachau Valley. This ties into his metaphor of the developmental chain, in which things of the past that do not hold enough art- or historical value to be monuments must make way for the next stages of human creation.

Decades later, UNESCO published its own work regarding preservation, taking a more global view of the responsibility of preserving world heritage. Having been created following World War II as a way to “build peace through international cooperation in Education, the Sciences, and Culture,” UNESCO sought to promote an international understanding of heritage rather than the nationalist philosophy that Dehio practiced.<sup>76</sup> In 1972, the same year as the World Heritage Convention, a UNESCO publication made the clear statement that architectural heritage must be understood in concert with the human needs that it reflects. This placed the utility and livability of an architectural monument on par with the aesthetic value of the structure and encouraged a balance between the two when preserving architectural heritage.<sup>77</sup> As I hope to demonstrate in this paper, the UNESCO approach to architectural heritage offers a framework for preservation in Letchworth and Falkenberg that may allow for a synthesis of tradition and innovation at both sites.

### *A discussion of place*

Many similarities to Riegl’s monument preservation can be seen in Dolores Hayden’s work, as she writes of how ‘place’ as a social concept is produced through and maintained by the continuity of architecture and the physical form, as well as how public discourse with planning

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<sup>76</sup> UNESCO, “History of UNESCO.” Accessed April 29, 2024. <https://www.unesco.org/en/history>.

<sup>77</sup> Unesco, ed. *Preserving and Restoring Monuments and Historic Buildings*, Museums and Monuments 14. (Paris: Unesco, 1972), 16.

bodies can influence architectural design in turn.<sup>78</sup> The concept of place creates a sense of belonging and identity unique to the characteristics of an area that elicits a desire to preserve and foster the structures, both physical and social, that define it. Places differentiate themselves in the built environment through the value attributed to people's experiences of the place over time, much in the same way that Riegl's monuments achieve relativity when they are taken out of the objective value of the original work and placed in relation to a broader understanding of art history. Hayden also takes inspiration from David Harvey, who writes about place as a "permanence" formed from a series of socio-economic processes affecting a space throughout time. This permanence, he argues, is heavily influenced by capital investment, which makes older places targets of "spatial reorganization" unless their identity is deemed worthy of preservation or reproduction.<sup>79</sup>

Successful maintenance of place and its value, Hayden argues, requires active communication between the public and the planner, and requires "a labor of love from everyone involved."<sup>80</sup> This reciprocal relationship can be seen in full display in both Letchworth's reinvestment scheme and the cooperative and democratic structure of tenancy in the 1892.

After Hayden's social-physical relationship produces a place worth preserving, Brian McCabe warns that the mere act of historic preservation can serve as an economically exclusionary action, as heritage designations increase real estate exposure and can begin to oust residents of lower socioeconomic status. This dynamic is one of the most important challenges that the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the 1892 face as world-renowned historical sites. As both sites were built upon a model of quality but affordable housing, the

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<sup>78</sup> Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press), 1995.

<sup>79</sup> David Harvey, "From space to place and back again: Reflections on the condition of postmodernity" in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. Jon Bird, (London ; New York: Routledge, 1993), 7.

<sup>80</sup> Hayden, 77.

question of their preservation is not simply an artistically or historically driven decision, but must also consider the economic implications of preservation on the residents. Melinda Milligan's work on the concept of "buildings as history"<sup>81</sup> adds further tension to this dynamic as she observes the tendency for many preservationists to separate buildings from their histories and to assume inherent value in the built environment that only increases with time. This inherent value seeks to justify the preservation of the built environment regardless of other social and economic factors and places little importance on the history and social heritage of a site. This runs counter to the approach that the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the 1892 advertise, in which physical architecture is maintained alongside and as a supplement to the historical identity of the site.

#### *Modern-day garden city theory and current housing pressures*

The UK and Germany presently find themselves in housing crises, to which Michael Edwards offers important context. Edwards writes of the housing situation in the UK in 2016 as being part of a much larger economic crisis. This manifests itself in widening wealth inequality and a deterioration of public housing despite a growing need for affordable units.<sup>82</sup> Edwards attributes the UK's economic struggles to decades of decline in the working class's wage share of the GDP.<sup>83</sup> In London, housing prices have skyrocketed in relation to the rest of the UK, and the increased privatization of housing has given low- and middle-income residents few affordable options as speculators cater to an influx of wealthy people to the city. This has major implications for Letchworth and other cities closely connected to London by train and raises the

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<sup>81</sup> Melinda J. Milligan, "Buildings as History: The Place of Collective Memory in the Study of Historic Preservation" in *Symbolic Interaction* 30, no. 1 (2007): 105.

<sup>82</sup> Michael Edwards, "The Housing Crisis and London." *City* 20, no. 2 (2016): 223.

<sup>83</sup> Edwards, 224.

potential for an influx of residents leaving London to live in a nearby suburb or exurb. The UK Office of National Statistics indicates a large increase in the cost of living around 2021 in the months after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, inflation reached a peak of 11.1 percent in October of 2022 and has remained high, dipping down in late 2023 but only recently reaching pre-pandemic levels of around three percent.<sup>84</sup>

The housing situation in Germany is no better than in the UK. According to the Hans Böckler Stiftung, as of May 2023, large German cities are in need of 1.9 million affordable housing units, and, as in the UK, social housing has fallen dramatically, from 2.09 million to 1.17 million units across the nation between 2006 and 2018.<sup>85</sup> While inflation in Germany did not reach the extremes seen in the UK, 2023 saw a 5.9 percent inflation rate, down from a record 6.9 percent in 2022 but still well above the pre-pandemic rates.

These crises, while different from those noted by Ebenezer Howard over a century ago, leave the state of urban planning in England and Germany wanting for change. To this end, Nicolas Vernet offers a practicable approach to modern garden city living that unpacks the misinterpretation of Ebenezer Howard's "Garden Cities of To-morrow," reveals the origins of suburban sprawl in the UK, and seeks to "Learn from the Past to Build the Future."<sup>86</sup> Vernet clarifies the misunderstanding that sprawling, inefficient suburbs and gated communities stem from Howard's garden city idea, and instead suggests that those who wished to follow Howard's footsteps simply collapsed under the pressures of dominant privatist planning ideologies.<sup>87</sup> He shows possibilities for future garden cities, based on a similar model to Howard's but adapted for

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<sup>84</sup> Brigid Francis-Devine et al., "Rising Cost of Living in the UK," accessed April 29, 2024. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9428/>.

<sup>85</sup> Hans Böckler Stiftung, "Wohnungsnot in Deutschland," Accessed April 29, 2024. <https://www.boeckler.de/de/auf-einen-blick-17945-20782.htm>.

<sup>86</sup> Nicolas Vernet and Anne Coste "Garden Cities of the 21st Century: A Sustainable Path to Suburban Reform" in *Urban Planning* 2, no. 4 (December 29, 2017): 185.

<sup>87</sup> Vernet, 185.

the 21st century, and showcases various diagrams by David Rudlin that visualize this adaptation.<sup>88</sup> This optimistic approach shows promise that the burden of being both a monument to and a bastion of the garden city ideology could be lifted from Letchworth's shoulders and raises the question of how Letchworth's identity would change should a garden city revival normalize the planning model and finally create the network of towns that Howard imagined. Would such a revival bring on a new era of pioneering planning ideologies to Letchworth, or would the world's first garden city favor an even more conservative preservation model, choosing instead to protect and highlight Letchworth's storied past?

### *Research Intervention*

Despite the widespread influence of the Garden City Movement, its failure to become the dominant sub-urban planning model has left only individual towns and housing estates to keep the garden city's theoretical framework in practice. By bringing the original Garden City Movement back into conversation with its German cousin I hope to reveal the contradictory nature of the monumentalization of living sites, as well as the difficulty of preserving the lone physical evidence of a movement while keeping its social ideology alive in a changing world. The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892 both offer rich histories filled with moments in which pieces of their heritage were lost or sacrificed for the sake of compromise with technological, social, or economic progress. I aim to investigate the role that such compromises play in the history of these sites to better understand how urban theory and practice form an imperfect relationship.

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<sup>88</sup> Vernet, 187.



## **Methodology**

The two sites used in my research lend themselves well to a comparative thematic analysis of the Garden City Movement. While they are vastly different in some aspects, they share core planning and administrative features that allow for a shared analysis of how tradition and innovation manifest themselves in the Garden City Movement. I was fortunate to receive the Redekop Family Environmental Research Grant for Undergraduates, which allowed me to visit Letchworth and Falkenberg to conduct initial research. At both sites, I experienced not only the deep history of the Garden City Movement but also the day-to-day atmosphere of the current generation of residents. To better understand the current planning practices of the Foundation and the 1892, I first collected historical data through several books written by those close to the Garden City Movement and the organizations themselves. As the flagship garden city, Letchworth's history is well documented. I drew upon the writings of C. B. Purdom and Mervyn Miller, who provide important primary and secondary historical accounts of the garden city and its administration throughout the decades. For more accounts of the early years of the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, I analyzed an article by John Lewis, the former Chief Executive of the Foundation.

Two important texts document the history of the 1892's presence in Falkenberg. Dr. Klaus Novy's 100-year commemoration of the 1892, is an exhaustive history of the 1892 (formerly the BSBV), providing in-depth descriptions of the cooperative's founding members and tracing the impacts of both World Wars and the partition of Germany, all the way until just after the fall of the Berlin wall. Renate Amann, an architect at the 1892, carries on where Novy leaves off, documenting the cooperative's work following the fall of the Berlin Wall.

My intention for the thematic analysis was to interview employees at the Foundation and the 1892 to hear firsthand how both organizations approach their histories and work through the tension between tradition and innovation at their respective sites. Unfortunately, a series of interviews did not end up being possible due to a low response rate, however, I was able to speak with Stuart Sapsford, a director at the Letchworth Garden City Foundation over Zoom. This interview was recorded and then transcribed using otter.ai, and the recording and transcription were stored in my UChicago's Box account. I first met Mr. Sapsford over the summer of 2023 when I was in Letchworth, and so when I secured IRB approval to perform interviews I reached out to him via email. The interview lasted one hour, during which I asked him a semi-structured list of questions regarding his work and the Foundation's approach to its stewardship of Letchworth. My data collection for Letchworth was supplemented by a YouTube video of a recorded interview with David Ames, the current executive director of the Foundation, as well as through articles and informational web pages on the Foundation's website.

As for Falkenberg, my data collection consisted primarily of scouring Renate Amann's 125th anniversary book and the 1892's website for descriptions of the cooperative's work over the past decade. This was then supplemented by an interview with Claudia Templin, a former employee of the 1892, which was published in a German monument preservation magazine. As both Letchworth and Falkenberg have either planned or built new developments in the 21st century, I analyzed the plans for both with the goal of comparing how the two organizations incorporated the legacy of the garden city and the original sites into their work.

## Analysis

Both the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892 place clear emphasis, not just on their histories, but on their goal to celebrate the legacy their site was built upon, to build upon it, and to share it with future generations. This desire manifests itself in two ways that both reimagine tradition and innovation, not as oppositional forces, but as producers of each other. This analysis seeks to understand this relationship along two guiding frameworks: ‘Innovation *as* Tradition’ and ‘Tradition *informs* Innovation.’ The former is based on the understanding that Letchworth and Falkenberg could only have existed through immense bursts of innovation. The sites, and the Garden City Movement as a whole, are celebrated due to the inventive solutions posed by Ebenezer Howard to solve the intense planning problems of his time. The latter places historical value on both sites and argues that the histories of Falkenberg and Letchworth produce a strong place identity that draws newer generations to it. This not only brings these new generations into conversation with the past, but it also allows for continuity in future development projects and gives space for each generation to put their own mark on where they live.

To do justice to an analysis of the tension between tradition and innovation in the Garden City Movement, it must first be acknowledged that this tension is universal. It is not a phenomenon exclusive to the Garden City Movement, or any planning movement for that matter. Any change to the built environment, intentional or otherwise, represents a new interaction of present and past that has the potential to influence the future identity of a place. However, I argue that a more heightened tension between tradition and innovation is produced when a defined planning movement has a large enough influence on the field of urbanism that the sites first built to its specifications achieve a Rieglian monumental status. Returning to Riegl’s understanding of

the goal of monuments as “keep[ing] certain human deeds or skills (or combinations thereof) in the consciousness of future generations,”<sup>89</sup> he additionally notes the presence of what he terms “art and historical monuments,”<sup>90</sup> which were not initially created to become monuments, but rather are monumentalized because they represent “a particular, so to say individual stage in the development of one of humanity’s creative fields.”<sup>91</sup> Both Letchworth and Falkenberg have been monumentalized over their histories as the impact of the Garden City Movement in the field of urban planning has gained international importance. Because of this, the built environment at both sites has gained a historic value beyond the aesthetic value of their architecture. The desire to preserve the original built environment of both sites is then inseparable from the desire to celebrate and maintain the planning identity that produced it.

### *Letchworth*

The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation offices stand at the north end of Broadway Gardens, the large central green space in the middle of Letchworth Garden City. When one enters, they are greeted by a reception desk that looks into a small museum space furnished with mid-century furniture. Informational placards adorn the walls and tell the story of the world’s first garden city, and just outside the museum sits a small shelf of merchandise. Each item proudly wears Letchworth’s history, whether it be the woodcut coasters or the tea towel depicting the town’s street plan in 1936, as shown in Figure 3.

Five months after visiting Letchworth, I joined a Zoom call with Stuart Sapsford, the Director of Communities, Culture, and Heritage at the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. Stuart grapples with the role of the Foundation as a social and real estate

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<sup>89</sup> Riegl, 55.

<sup>90</sup> “Kunst- und *historische Denkmale*”

<sup>91</sup> “[eine] Stufe der Entwicklung irgend eines Schaffensgebietes der Menschheit.” in Riegl, 74.

organization as he and the Foundation's Leadership Team turn their eyes toward the future of Letchworth Garden City. As he describes the Foundation's strategic aims for the next decade, he turns his focus to the authentic architecture from Letchworth's first round of building.

So firstly is our aging estate. We recognize that we have some buildings... that are now 100 plus years old, there or thereabouts. I think the thing that the general public don't really kind of consider, accept, or understand is that buildings have a lifespan. They're never designed to be there forever, naturally, so we have a lot of stock that is of very similar age, [while] a lot of towns have things developing at different paces.<sup>92</sup>

The tabula rasa planning style that Ebenezer Howard required to physically implement the garden city concept as well as to test its alternative economic and governmental forms, has drastically exaggerated the problem of historical preservation in Letchworth, both due to the cost of renovating the deteriorating built environment and because the idea of the 'original' town is not restricted to a choice few flagship buildings. Instead, the town recognizes over 1,700 "Homes of Special Interest," which receive this designation due to their "Exceptional design," "Historic value," if they are "a Heritage Character Area home that retains many original features," or if "properties [are] located in areas which reflect the town and country ethos of the Garden City."<sup>93</sup> The alteration of these buildings, as well as any other buildings in the town's designated Heritage Character Area, must meet the requirements of the Foundation's Scheme of Management, which implements and enforces heritage protection guidelines to protect the buildings that "played a pivotal role in defining the early character of the Garden City."<sup>94</sup> While both the Scheme of Management and the North Herts government's "conservation area" designation name certain buildings and areas as more historically significant than others, they ultimately understand Letchworth's value as a complete town.

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<sup>92</sup> Stuart Sapsford, video call with author, February 14, 2024.

<sup>93</sup> "Heritage Character Area Guide" in "Altering Your Home," Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://www.lechworth.com/your-home/altering-your-home>.

<sup>94</sup> "Heritage Character Area Guide."

The restoration of these aging buildings, however, is only one of many pressing concerns that the Heritage Foundation faces today. As the global environmental crisis worsens by the day, England has been steadily raising its expectations for sustainability. These are measured using Energy Performance Certificates, which “every house needs when it’s being sold to determine the energy credentials,” Sapsford explains, “it is going to be and is being very significantly impactful on us as an organization because shifting stock to that level as a landlord [is very difficult], and requirements are greater for landlords because we need to get on and do it now.”<sup>95</sup> He went on to explain to me how the Foundation is looking to rework the Scheme of Management “to make it fit for the next 100 years.” This approach would maintain much of the aesthetic qualities that the Homes of Special Interest offer to the town but would begin to make some exceptions, including altering the types of glass allowed in windows, the cladding on the walls, and even the potential for allowing solar panels on the roofs. To further compound the Foundation’s responsibilities, the cost of living has skyrocketed in the UK, especially since the Covid 19 pandemic:

At the moment, you know, it’s just inflated so significantly, that we’ve got a lot of [people], particularly families, who are now falling into the poverty trap, so their disposable income cannot meet the level required to live a quality life. And we’re concerned that we are impacting people more than we should do, because we are not allowing the efficiencies of their property to be sufficient that they can effectively save money on energy bills and living to be able to reinvest somewhere else, which is contradictory to our charitable objects around supporting people in poverty.<sup>96</sup>

While the Foundation’s Scheme of Management is meant to “preserve the architectural integrity of the town,”<sup>97</sup> its current presence has begun to have detrimental consequences to the social aims of the Garden City Movement as an affordable place for the working and middle

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<sup>95</sup> Sapsford, video call with author, February 14, 2024.

<sup>96</sup> Sapsford, video call with author, February 14, 2024.

<sup>97</sup> Lewis, 162.

classes. This has produced a moment in which the town's tradition, depicted most clearly through the preservationist practices that see the built environment as a monument for the Garden City Movement, no longer complements the innovative approach to planning that made the movement successful.

It is out of this moment, however, that the Foundation has been able to resynthesize tradition and innovation to pose new (but at times familiar) solutions to the problems of our age. The Foundation is looking ahead toward future generations and sees the next 5-10 years as a vital period of transformation for Letchworth. Unlike the aging housing stock, Letchworth's population is full of residents of all ages. On nice days, the centrally located Howard Park is packed with families, and young children splash in a shallow pool that has offered leisurely entertainment for nearly a century. Elderly residents tend to the personal gardens allotted to each home, and the pubs in the town center bring picnic tables out for live music nights.

As with any town, however, a population of all backgrounds produces varying levels of social engagement. Of course, it is impossible to visit Letchworth without being exposed to its history, as any stroll through the town will inevitably pass the countless parks and buildings named after Howard, his wife, his colleagues, and even his three magnets diagram,<sup>98</sup> but the actual history of the Garden City Movement and the values from which it was born are no longer as prevalent to the community as they once were. Sapsford explains that the town's older residents are generally the only ones who are bought into the Garden City Movement and the principles that define it. "Unfortunately," he concedes, "a lot of them are quite backward-looking.... In terms of the more general public, I think there is an understanding about what Letchworth is, but not much more than that."<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Two pubs in town are named after the famous diagram. If one pays enough attention they will begin to see it everywhere, from plaques, as seen in Figure 7, to storefront signage, and even on manhole covers.

<sup>99</sup> Sapsford, video call with author, February 14, 2024.

The Foundation's task is twofold: to bring the older generations into agreement with the changes being made in the town and to educate the younger generations on Letchworth's history to help them foster a connection with the town and help them make the most of the resources it provides. The former requires an understanding of *innovation as tradition*, in which Sapsford and the Foundation meet older generations where they stand as proponents of the original Garden City Movement and ask, "What would Ebenezer Howard do today? Because he could never have foreseen what was going to happen 120 years on." Howard's vision and the effort to design, plan, and build Letchworth as the first-ever garden city required boundless innovation and flexibility, as did moving into the first houses as they began to be built. C.B. Purdom described the first generation of residents as "enthusiasts who had been looking forward for years to the founding of the town. They came to it in a spirit of adventure, they discovered it as though it were a new land... They hoped to revise all, or nearly all, social institutions."<sup>100</sup> He wrote further, "Their fine enthusiasm, to make their place unlike other places, is likely to remain in the town a long while before, if ever, it be destroyed."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Purdom, 51.

<sup>101</sup> Purdom, 53.





Figure 7. Broadway Boulevard<sup>102</sup>  
One of the many plaques commemorating Howard and his ideas.

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<sup>102</sup> Photo taken by the author, August 9, 2024.

Of course, the town is no longer a new frontier, and even the oldest generations in Letchworth are already generations older than the group that Purdom described. However, those of them born in Letchworth were likely some of the first to experience the town in a somewhat settled state after the bulk of its construction finished. That version of Letchworth, around the time shown in Figure 3, is arguably the most ‘fundamental’ garden city the world will ever see. Still fresh and new, it represented the culmination of theory, planning, and execution in a built form that embodied the Garden City Movement. The version of Letchworth that its current oldest population grew up with is what I consider a monument to the Garden City Movement in its purest form. To this extent, it is understandable that the next 5-10 years of transformational change that Sapsford predicts in Letchworth are being met with reluctance by the town's older population. However, an appeal to the innovative origins of the movement is at least a starting point for winning them over.

In an attempt to reach the younger population, the Foundation has implemented place-based learning in the school curriculum which teaches students about Letchworth’s history and connects them with cultural resources throughout the town. Sapsford explained, “We do young people art programs where they can get their artwork put up on a wall in the hope that their families come along and see it and engage with the story, engage with the town and feel a bit more of that kind of social cohesion and ownership around the town.”<sup>103</sup> While Letchworth’s older population demands the preservation of the garden city values to a T and pushes back against changes that deface the ‘monument’ of the town, the newer population’s trend toward ambivalence regarding the Garden City Movement poses different challenges to the Foundation. Without a solid understanding of why the Foundation exists, its role in the community, and the function of Letchworth’s reinvestment system can seem unwelcome to residents. “Some people

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<sup>103</sup> Sapsford, video call with author, February 14, 2024.

maybe have less ability to see things as part of the bigger picture,” suggested Sapsford, “and I think that’s what we’re trying to do, is to connect the community in better ways.”<sup>104</sup> By encouraging people to learn about Letchworth’s history and understand its impact on the town today, the Foundation is creating a dynamic in which *tradition informs innovation* in the town.

This dynamic is best seen in the Foundation’s plans for new housing in Letchworth. In a move that will likely disgruntle the older population, the Foundation is aiming to develop around 1300 homes in the next five years, taking the population well beyond Howard’s proposed 32,000 resident limit (figure 2.). However, this new development represents both a push toward the future and a firm commitment to traditional garden city values. Due to Covid, plans have not yet been fully realized for the development, but a 2019 newsletter from the Foundation stated that 40% of the planned units in the new development would be affordable housing and that a primary school, a medical center, and a new neighborhood retail center would be included in the project. Coming out of the pandemic, Letchworth finds itself in an interesting situation. Despite the economic impact of the pandemic on many residents and businesses and the losses that the Foundation experienced due to their funding being sourced by real estate returns in the town, the Foundation’s status as a non-governmental organization allowed it to act quickly and help the community through the pandemic. David Ames, Executive Director of Stewardship and Development for the Foundation, spoke to the Nottingham and Derby Society of Architects about what the foundation was able to achieve by making the most of its role as a charitable organization following garden city values:

Overnight, we had 24-hour support for any of our local residents, we got their shopping, their prescriptions, [and] we had helplines set up... we also gave rent relief to our retail and leisure tenants before the government announced any sort of financial support. We gave them a major rent holiday knowing that it would have a major impact on our

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<sup>104</sup> Sapsford, video call with author, February 14, 2024.

income, but we needed to look on the long term... we saved those businesses, there's no doubt about it.<sup>105</sup>

The Foundation's reaction to the pandemic, as well as the ample open spaces provided by Letchworth's green belt and the parks and trails throughout the town, showed how a commitment to community investment and green spaces contributes to a high quality of life to this day as much as it did in comparison to the large industrial cities of the early 1900s. Because of this, a new wave of interest in the town has been sparked and more people want to move in. The introduction of hybrid work schedules and the extremely high rent prices in London have once again made the town-country magnet of Letchworth an attractive alternative. Because of this, the new developments that were in the works before the pandemic now offer the Foundation a fantastic opportunity to revitalize Letchworth's economy, as the yield from a relatively financially stable new wave of residents will allow the Foundation to invest in the current residents (largely families) who, according to Sapsford, "are now falling into the poverty trap."<sup>106</sup>

The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation's current approach to its stewardship of the city shows its dedication to the values of the Garden City Movement through its ability to use its fundamental principles to solve the compounding issues of its aging yet historic housing stock, environmental concerns, and the economic and social impacts of Covid. By adapting its administrative structures to meet the needs of current residents, the Foundation has not only been able to preserve and celebrate Letchworth's history—it has also ensured its future.

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<sup>105</sup> David Ames, "Ebenezer Howard and Letchworth Garden City with David Ames," Nottingham and Derby Society of Architects. Posted on December 12, 2021. YouTube video, 1:30:39. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dSe1RuNzo7A>.

<sup>106</sup> Sapsford, video call with author, February 14, 2024.





Figure 8. Letchworth Town Center.<sup>107</sup>

Many of the small businesses in Letchworth's town center were financially supported by the Foundation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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<sup>107</sup> Photo taken by the author, August 9, 2023.

## *Falkenberg*

In comparison to the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation's extensive, multidisciplinary treatment of the town, the presence of the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892 in Falkenberg seems much simpler. The site is just one of many properties that the housing cooperative owns and rents to its members, and the total number of members among all sites is just over half of Letchworth's population, standing at around 18,500, of which Falkenberg makes up only a few hundred.<sup>108</sup> However, what makes Falkenberg an important counterpart to Letchworth in this project is the depth and clarity with which the 1892 addresses its position within the tension between tradition and innovation. Additionally; its deep ties to the German Garden City Society allow for a more robust, two-perspective understanding of how tradition and innovation interact with the unique characteristics of the Garden City Movement.

Falkenberg, Like Letchworth, was also built from a tabula rasa. While Bruno Taut had planned to build a small, but complete garden city of 1,500 units for 7,500 residents, the fact that only a fraction of the units were built means that the entire stock of original housing is the same age and exists in a relatively small area, giving the site the feel of an architectural exhibition more than it represents a garden city. This feeling is only magnified by the fact that Gartenstadt Falkenberg is one of six UNESCO World Heritage Sites that recognize Berlin's Modernist Housing Estates. The site is one of several designated monuments to modernism, each chosen to represent its own contribution to the extensive history of housing and architecture reform in Berlin in the early 1900s. However, this relationship among the German Garden City Movement, the Modernist architecture movement, and the still-young housing cooperative culture in Berlin

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<sup>108</sup> "Wer wir sind," 1892, accessed March 5, 2024, <https://1892.de/wer-wir-sind/>.

created a robust understanding of the roles of tradition and innovation in architecture and planning.

Books on modernist planning in Germany tend to entertain philosophical analyses of the movement, perhaps best seen in the title of the book *Zwischen Tradition und Innovation: 100 Jahre Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892*,<sup>109</sup> a publication written by the late Dr. Klaus Novy, whom the 1892 recognizes as “one of the most engaged proponents” of cooperative housing in Germany.<sup>110</sup> Novy’s extensive work covers everything about the history of the 1892 all the way through until its centennial, and his writing refers often to an interplay of past and future. The introduction to his book, “A glimpse into the past can also be a glimpse into the future” describes the history of the cooperative movement as something that is “not a constant, not a fixed model, but rather a lived form and the attempt to replace external restraints with intraorganizational cooperation and solidarity... the history of housing reform is also a history of innovations.”<sup>111</sup> The 1892 doubled down on Novy’s treatment of their work as mediators between tradition and innovation, writing its own publication for its 125th anniversary titled, *Innovation aus Tradition Seit 1892*.<sup>112</sup> This pattern extends beyond the 1892, as Winfried Nerdinger’s book on Bruno Taut calls him “an architect between tradition and avant-garde.”<sup>113</sup>

This commitment to analyzing how architecture and planning exist within historical and temporal frameworks is incredibly important for producing a critique of the monumentalization of planning movements. Within the historical context of the 1892’s development projects and the

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<sup>109</sup> “*Between Tradition and Innovation: 100 years of the Berlin Building and Housing Cooperative of 1892.*”

<sup>110</sup> Renate Amann, “Vorwort,” in Novy, 3.

<sup>111</sup> Title: “*Ein Blick in die Geschichte kann auch ein Blick in die Zukunft sein*” - quote: “*sie ist keine Konstante, kein feststehendes Modell, sondern gelebte Form und der Versuch, äußere Zwänge durch innerorganisatorische Kooperation und Solidarität zu ersetzen... Die Geschichte der Wohnreform ist auch eine Geschichte der Innovationen.*” in Novy, 6.

<sup>112</sup> “*Innovation out of Tradition since 1892.*”

<sup>113</sup> “*Architekt zwischen Tradition und Avantgarde*” in Winfried Nerdinger, *Bruno Taut 1880-1938: Architekt zwischen Tradition und Avantgarde* (Stuttgart München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt GmbH, 2001) 3.

larger housing reform movement in Berlin, Gartenstadt Falkenberg is just one of many experimental settlements produced through the organization's ongoing housing reform effort. On one hand, this allows Falkenberg to stand as an important monument to the Garden City Movement's influence on German urban planning, as the 1892 intentionally avoids defining its approach to housing other than to state its commitment to constant social and housing reform. On the other hand, this isolation alienates Falkenberg somewhat from the garden city ideal that Bruno Taut and the DGG wanted to implement on a larger scale in Germany, especially in the aftermath of World War I. The scale of Berlin's small settlements lends itself to the reduction of its historic sites to what can feel like a museum representing a snapshot of a larger movement that never fully took off. Claudia Templin, a former employee of the 1892, spoke on the tendency for Falkenberg to be treated as an attraction:

[the residents] are well acquainted with people with cameras strolling through the settlement and taking photographs, and also sometimes with some tourists standing uninvited in their garden... many residents are proud of "their" settlement and gladly speak with scholars, students, and tourists. Photographs are shown and anecdotes from "the good old times" are shared, sometimes over a cup of coffee in the garden.<sup>114</sup>

To aid these wandering tourists and academics, small pillars are scattered around Falkenberg that speak to the settlement's history and its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage site. In its recognition of the designation, the 1892 reiterated its mission as a reform-oriented organization, writing,

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<sup>114</sup> "Sie kennen es, dass Menschen mit Kameras durch die Siedlung schlendern und fotografieren und auch, dass so mancher Tourist unangemeldet im Garten steht... Viele Bewohner sind stolz auf "ihre" Siedlung und reden gern mit den Wissenschaftlern, Studenten und Touristen. Es werden Bilder gezeigt und Anekdoten aus der "guten alten Zeit" erzählt, das kann dann auch schon mal bei einer Tasse Kaffee im Garten geschehen." in Claudia Templin, "Interview mit Claudia Templin," interview by Christiane Schillig, Monumente Online, February 2014. <https://www.monumente-online.de/de/ausgaben/2014/1/welterbe-siedlungen-der-berliner-moderne.php>.



the 1892 is conscious of both the rich traditional heritage and of the continuation of innovative ambitions [of the organization]... on these principles, in January of 2009 the 1892 founded the ‘World Cultural Heritage Foundation Gartenstadt Falkenberg and Schillerpark-Siedlung of Berlin Modernism.’<sup>115</sup> The foundation does not only support the maintenance of the listed buildings; the social togetherness within the cooperative community will also be actively sponsored. This is not only about nostalgic retrospectives or social leisure activity, but it is rather about meeting the demands of today’s demographic change, about intergenerational ways of life, energy and climate justice, diversity, and the preservation of cultural-architectural qualities.<sup>116</sup>

The 1892 maintains a level of distance between its abstract innovative identity and the concrete tradition that is produced by the settlements it builds. This allows it to operate between tradition and innovation at each site as the title of Novy’s book accurately portrays, which helps relieve and prevent the kinds of tension seen in Letchworth where the built environment and the ideology that created it are inextricable.

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<sup>115</sup> “Stiftung Weltkulturerbe Gartenstadt Falkenberg und Schillerpark-Siedlung der Berliner Moderne” in Stiftung Welterbe, “Wir über uns” April 16, 2019, <https://welterbe-berlin.de/wir-ueber-uns-welterbe-berlin/>.

<sup>116</sup> “Die 1892 ist sich sowohl dem traditionsreichen Erbe als auch der Fortführung innovativer Zielsetzungen bewusst... Mit diesen Leitgedanken hat die 1892 im Januar 2009 die „Stiftung Weltkulturerbe Gartenstadt Falkenberg und Schillerpark-Siedlung der Berliner Moderne“ gegründet. Sie unterstützt nicht nur die Pflege des denkmalgeschützten baulichen Bestands. Auch der soziale Zusammenhalt innerhalb der genossenschaftlichen Gemeinschaft wird aktiv gefördert. Dabei geht es nicht allein um nostalgischen Rückblick oder gesellige Freizeitgestaltung, sondern um die Verknüpfung mit heutigen Anforderungen des demografischen Wandels, um generationsübergreifende Lebensformen, energetische und klimagerechte Ertüchtigung, Diversität und den Erhalt baukultureller Qualitäten” in Stiftung Welterbe.



Figure 9. Orienting the visitor<sup>117</sup>

One of the many self-guided walking tour ‘informational pillars’ found around the settlement.

<sup>117</sup> Photo taken by the author, August 14, 2023.

Despite their tendency to move on from their former projects, the 1892 did revisit Bruno Taut's dream of developing the entire plateau that Gartenstadt Falkenberg was built on, nearly eighty years after the project was begun. The New Falkenberg Estate<sup>118</sup> project, shown in Figure 10, was started in 1991, and a second set of buildings was constructed between 2011 and 2014. The goal of the project was not to create modern replicas of the kinds of houses Taut designed in 1913 for the settlement but rather to connect the two sites through their representation of the pressing issues of their time. In their 125th anniversary publication, the 1892 explains,

The reinterpretation of the garden city idea concerned itself with various aspects: an important focus was "climate-conscious building." Special importance was placed on sustainability, conservation of resources, the usage of renewable energy, and high environmental standards... As a result, we show different interpretations within the over 100-year history of the Falkenberg Estate, but at the same time the cooperative connects the old and the new settlement styles with lasting ideas of community-oriented and innovative life in nature.<sup>119</sup>

The New Falkenberg Estate project is a perfect example of the 1892's complex understanding of the interplay between the past and future in urban planning. It pays deep respect to the original site's heritage and allows it to stand as a monument to early urban planning in Berlin, but it also acknowledges the massive strides that society has taken since the first colorful house was built in the southeast outskirts of Berlin.

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<sup>118</sup> "Neue Gartenstadt Falkenberg."

<sup>119</sup> "Die Neuinterpretation der Gartenstadtidee bezog sich auf verschiedene Aspekte: Einen wichtigen Schwerpunkt bildete das Thema 'klimagerechtes Bauen'. Dabei wurde besonderer Wert auf Nachhaltigkeit, Ressourceneinsparung, den Einsatz regenerativer Energien und hohe ökologische Standards gelegt... Im Resultat zeigen wir zwar unterschiedliche Interpretationen innerhalb einer über 100-jährigen Geschichte der Gartenstadt Falkenberg, gleichzeitig verknüpft die genossenschaftliche Trägerschaft den alten und den neuen Siedlungsteil mit nachhaltigen Ideen des gemeinschaftsorientierten und innovativen Wohnens im Grünen." in Renate Amann, et al., *Innovation aus Tradition seit 1892*, Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892, 2017, 38.





Figure 10. Neue Gartenstadt Falkenberg<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Photo taken by author, August 14, 2023.

## Conclusion

Tradition and innovation and the tension between them are not new topics to urban planning. Every new addition to the built environment deals with this tension in some way or another. As Purdom wrote soon after Letchworth was constructed, “Every town is thus a continual change, a constant pulling down and building afresh, and it might even be said that of all the arts that of town-building is the least permanent.”<sup>121</sup> The dynamic of tradition and innovation becomes especially interesting in the moments in which the specific historical impact of an innovative movement is large enough that the sites built on its theory are monumentalized— giving the site a historical value that is dependent on its relationship to the theory and essentially defining the movement based on the values that it held when the monument was built. At this moment, the innovation that produced the monument and the tradition that the monument represents are one and the same. Past this point, however, they begin to pull apart, as any alteration to the built environment or change in the social aims of the movement represents an innovation that deviates from the fixed, monumentalized tradition.

More than a century after Letchworth and Falkenberg were built, it is clear that the conditions that led to the Garden City Movement are long gone. The dense, industrial cores of cities have been replaced by white-collar central business districts, and the internet age has allowed first-world cities to globalize and outsource their production. While Lewis Mumford noted nearly 80 years ago that sprawling suburbs are the antithesis of the Garden City Movement,<sup>122</sup> suburbs continue to provide housing in the vicinity of central cities, just outside of their hustle and bustle. However, the valorization of the large metropolis has created a new draw toward the city, and as city centers become more expensive and sought after, rent prices have

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<sup>121</sup> Purdom, 1.

<sup>122</sup> Lewis Mumford, “The Garden City Idea and Modern Planning,” in Howard, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*. 35.

soared. As a result London and Berlin, among countless other metropolises, are facing extreme housing crises.<sup>123</sup> As people once again turn to the garden city as an urban alternative to the crowding and cost of big cities, land-owning organizations like the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892 must assess their values.

The aging built environment at Letchworth and Falkenberg has only added more strain to the environmental and economic problems of today, and yet it is this ‘original’ built environment that is most closely associated with the dynamic, innovative nature of the Garden City Movement. As the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and the Berliner Bau- und Wohnungsgenossenschaft von 1892 have continued the stewardship of their sites, they have found similar ways to respect the monumental value of their history while simultaneously redefining the Garden City Movement to better approach the economic, environmental, and social issues of the 21st century.

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<sup>123</sup> Hackett, Paul, “The Housing Crisis in London, Berlin and Other German Cities: A British-German Dialogue,” 1.

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