



# ” The Garden City Concept on the example of Podkowa Leśna

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## The Origins and General Principles of the Garden City

The garden city concept was developed by Ebenezer Howard in the late 19th century as a response to the issues faced by industrial urban centres, which were overcrowded and expanding in an unplanned and rapid manner. Residents of these cities lived in poor conditions, often in rented, cramped apartments suffering from humidity issues and a lack of access to sunlight. These conditions negatively impacted public health and contributed to social problems. At the same time, E. Howard observed depopulation in rural settlements. He aimed to create a solution that would improve the quality of life for London's workers while simultaneously revitalizing the surrounding villages.

In his vision of the city of the future, he sought to combine the advantages of urban life with the benefits of rural living, while eliminating their respective disadvantages. The garden city concept was designed to accommodate 32 000 residents across an area of 6 000 acres (approximately 2 400 hectares). It was based on a circular plan, divided into urban and agricultural zones in a 1:5 ratio. The urban area was located at the centre of the circle and surrounded by agricultural land. A park was situated at the heart of the city, around which public buildings and service facilities were arranged. Radiating outward from the park were residential districts composed of single-family homes with large gardens, providing private green spaces for residents. Beyond the residential zones there was a narrow belt of industrial buildings, offering employment opportunities for the local population, along with an eco-friendly railway facilitating easy and fast transportation between districts. The outermost section of the circle, designated for agriculture, began beyond the railway tracks and was covered with farms, orchards and forests.

The first city built in accordance with the garden city concept was Letchworth Garden City in the United Kingdom. The plan was to develop dozens of such satellite towns around London, but only a few were successfully completed.

## The Spread of the Concept in Poland

The garden city concept reached Poland in a modified form, as its initial implementation in early garden cities encountered challenges that necessitated adjustments to fit the realities of the time. It became evident that rental costs exceeded the financial capabilities of London's workers, and instead, wealthier social classes seeking respite from the hustle and bustle of city life began moving into garden cities.

Additionally, in Poland the goal was not to create independent, self-sufficient towns, but rather commuter towns serving major urban centres, following the idea of "live in the countryside, work in the city." The first garden cities in Polish territories emerged in the interwar period within the Warsaw metropolitan area. However, the homes – essentially villas – did not align with the original vision, as they were intended not for workers, but for the affluent Warsaw intelligentsia.

## Podkowa Leśna

The most famous example of a garden city in Poland is the suburban town of Podkowa Leśna, which actively promotes itself as a garden city on its official website. It was established along the newly built suburban railway line connecting Warsaw, Grodzisk, and Żyrardów as a response to the unplanned development of new residential estates at the time. Thanks to its planned urban layout in accordance with the new concept, it was intended to become an ideal place to live.

An area of 292 hectares from the Podkowa Leśna estate was designated for the future city. The land was divided into 11 mini-districts, comprising 1 189 plots. The entire area was split into northern and southern



sections by the railway line, with a station located in the town centre. In the south-western part of Podkowa Leśna, space was allocated for a park with a pond and sports and recreational facilities. The sale of plots and the construction of the first houses began in 1926. By the outbreak of World War II, the town's population had grown to approximately 1 750 residents.

Today, Podkowa Leśna consists mostly of villas and historical buildings surrounded by greenery. Thanks to its network of cycling paths and the presence of three nature reserves and the Młochowski Forest, the town is a popular destination for outdoor recreation among nearby residents. Additionally, it boasts a rich cultural offering. Podkowa Leśna continues to develop by incorporating new technologies and undertaking environmental protection initiatives, such as the "Podkowa Leśna = Human Smart Town" project. The town's uniqueness is further confirmed by the inclusion of its urban layout in the register of historical monuments in 1981.



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