

Western Europe Is Found to Lead U.S. in Community Planning



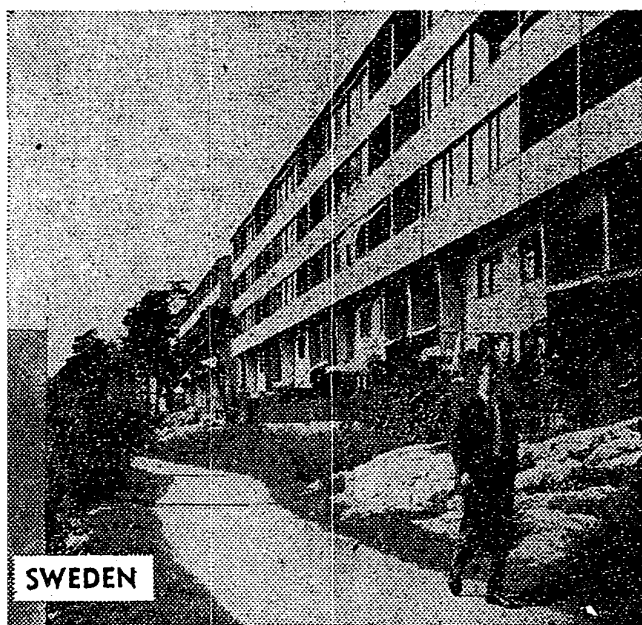
Cumbernauld, 14 miles from Glasgow, is a "new town" planned for population of 70,000. At top are terraced houses; in center, Y-plan houses. Pedestrian paths thread the town.



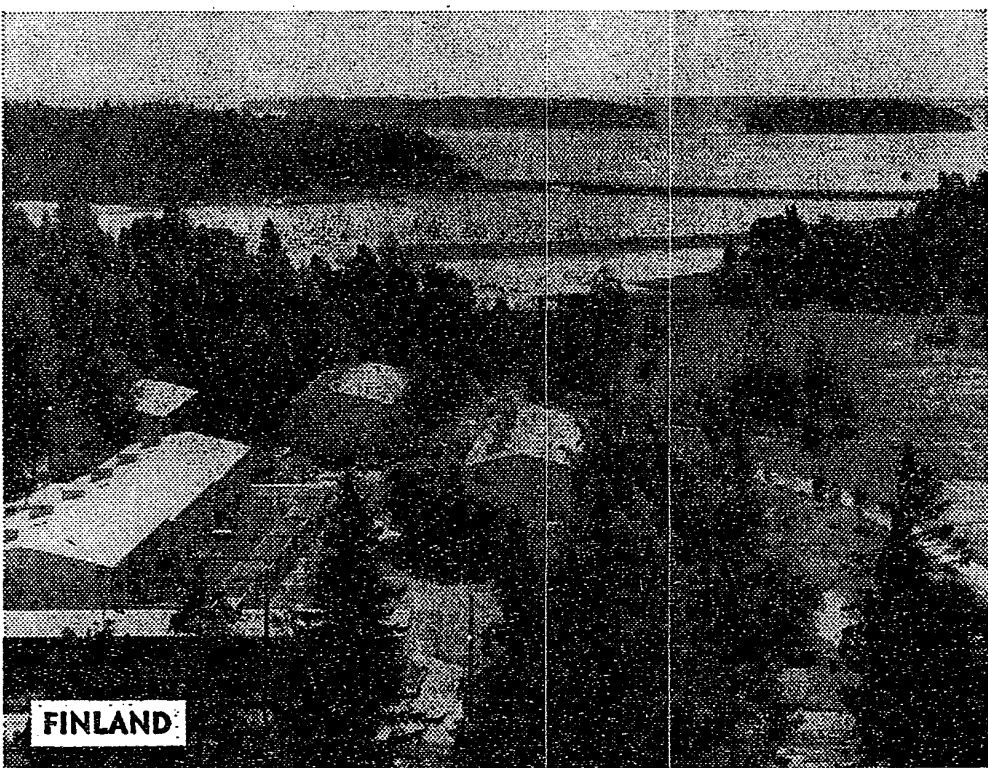
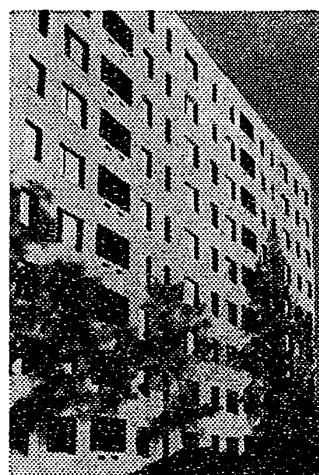
Structure near Amsterdam is typical of large, slab apartment buildings going up beside traditional Dutch houses.



Government-built project of high-rise apartments on a Victorian estate near London has reinforced-concrete buildings of progressive design in a carefully preserved orchard.



Above: Studio apartments near a lake, part of Stockholm's new satellite town of Vallingby.  
Left: In "element" buildings, walls are prefabricated and are quickly assembled at the site.



Garden city of Tapiola: New houses sensitively sited in pine and birch woods near lake. This "new town" on outskirts of Helsinki is planned for an eventual population of 80,000.

Major Builders Are Impressed After a Tour

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Twenty of the United States' largest home builders, developers, investors and planners have just completed a tour of Britain, Scandinavia and Germany to assess what Western Europe has done to cope with the population explosion and postwar urban growth. In a whirlwind two weeks they absorbed the high spots of 20 years of European city planning and housing design.

Their concentrated dose of the best building Europe has to offer included complete new communities and the planned satellite towns around older cities that are the European answer to American suburban sprawl.

It ranged from the exalted theories and pedestrian results of some of the English "new towns" created since World War II to dramatic experiments with massive, prefabricated, high-rise housing in Scandinavia that make United States efforts seem dated and quaint.

The response of the American builders has been a stunned mixture of admiration and skepticism. Conceding that European community planning and housing are far ahead of American examples, they maintain ruefully that it can't happen here.

The visitors were men responsible for an impressive segment of the American landscape. They included representatives of enterprises like the 93,000-acre Irvine Ranch development in California and a community for 125,000 to be called Columbia, now in construction between Washington and Baltimore. Many of their suburban developments accommodate 40,000 to 60,000 residents, or approximately the same number of people housed in the European "new towns." But the resemblance ends right there.

The European "new town" is

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a concept that does not exist in the United States. It is much more than the potluck provision of homes by private enterprise in conventional suburban subdivisions.

The new town deals specifically with continuing housing shortages and the chaotic post-war spread of cities by promoting orderly growth instead of random exploitation of land. It is government directed, controlled and financed.

The new town provides predominantly low-income and middle-income housing, not in isolation but as part of an over-all regional plan that also coordinates transportation, industry and open spaces with all required commercial, cultural, social, economic and educational facilities. It operates on the assumption of the priority of national needs rather than of private profits.

The building of these complete new communities and of a controlled physical environment is considered a challenge and marvel of the 20th century. The European architect-planner plays an awesomely godlike role in his selection of city sites, creation of environment and regulation of human life.

### Scale Is Impressive

To see the sometimes stunning, sometimes distressing results of these experiments Americans must go abroad. If it can't happen here, as the American developers maintain, it is definitely happening in Western Europe, on an impressive scale.

Many of the new communities are designed and planned with a sophistication, economy and coordination, and frequently with an architectural grace and elegance, that critics feel put the American affluent society to shame. The European new towns and satellite communities

are creating "environment" in a total sense that has hardly gone beyond the intellectual discussion stage in the United States.

The results are often spectacular to American eyes. Making quick comparisons, the success of over-all planning theory on a vast scale is greatest in Britain. But honors for the environment created, in human and esthetic terms, go to Scandinavia.

Just outside of Stockholm exceptionally attractive residential communities are rising along a sparkling, art-enriched new subway being extended as quickly as the towns are built. Public rapid transit is the basic premise on which expansion rests.

### Features Widely Copied

Vallingby, nine miles from the center of the city, completed in 1958, has had the features of its trend-setting shopping center and pedestrian mall copied widely in Europe and the United States. Nearby Farsta is now repeating the successful formula.

Progressive, sophisticated experiments with high-rise housing currently under way at Nasbydal and Grinthorp, other Stockholm satellites, are a design revelation that makes United States failures in high-rise building, particularly in New York City, seem pathetically obvious.

In Finland the Helsinki skyline can be seen from Pihlajamäki, one of a series of new municipally designed and built suburban satellites that offer superior architecture in a superb natural setting. The garden city of Tapiola, nearby, is a planner's pilgrimage point for its design quality, varied housing types and mixture of income and social levels.

In Britain it is now possible to study the dramatic effects of two decades of planned de-

centralization of sprawling cities. The results also demonstrate England's traditional dedication to the ideal of a low-density, bucolic, green "country-town" that grew out of the sooty 19th-century Dickensian industrial slums.

Approximately 20 English new towns have been built on this pattern. The majority are disappointing, standardized manifestations of lower-middle-class tastes in both one-level sociological and one-style architectural terms.

The best and newest of the British products, the virgin Scottish town of Cumbernauld now well along 14 miles from Glasgow, reverses many of the accepted English town-planning principles for much greater densities and a remarkably high level of design sophistication.

### Towns Are of 2 Types

These European new towns are of two types: the totally self-sufficient community that provides a supporting economic base as well as housing; and the satellite residential suburb tied to the center of a neighboring large city by efficient public transportation. Britain is emphasizing the former; Scandinavia prefers the latter.

Differences in the British and Scandinavian approach and results are grounded in differences in their problems. In London, for example, English planning policy is trying to decentralize a spread-out, conglomerate city of 8.2 million. Stockholm and Helsinki are concerned with expanding and unifying still manageable cities, the population of Greater Stockholm being 1.2 million and of Helsinki less than 500,000.

All of these new communities exist because the European post-war housing shortage was exploited as a planning tool. Faced with the crisis created by wartime destruction and peacetime growth, the Governments of

Britain and Western Europe took over.

Faced with nowhere to live, people went docilely to new towns and the only available housing.

In the United States the post-war housing shortage was also acute, but the solution was undertaken by free enterprise. Without coordinating controls, the result has been 20 years of suburban scatteration, chaotic land waste, multiplying regional problems and a shortage of middle-income accommodations that have finally led to public concern about the American environment, ending in a soul-searching conference on "natural beauty" at the White House level this year.

### Control by Government

The European solution is based on total government control, a process traditionally offensive to the American sense of freedom, particularly in the economic sector. In country after country, careful questioning aimed at pinning down the reasons for superior plans and designs elicits the same basic answers. Government regulation and government financing have done the job.

In Europe land is scarce, housing is still short and the welfare state is a universally accepted fact. Land is therefore considered a public concern and the environment is accepted as a public interest. Low-income and moderate-income housing is built as a top-priority need. Rents are often kept to artificially low levels. Both construction and rents are government subsidized. Financing is government regulated.

Speculation has been virtually outlawed in many places by restricting builders' profits and liberties. Britain is even considering a tax to end land speculation completely, since much free land already contains government-financed improvements

in line with established national regional planning policy.

Regional planning has been a hard reality in Europe for a long time, in Sweden for as much as half a century. In the United States it has not yet passed beyond debate and paper proposals.

In Britain even the location of the industry on which the new towns are dependent is controlled through government licensing. Everywhere the powers for planning and building are explicitly legal and financial and design controls are rigid.

Seen on the spot, it becomes quite clear that the new and sometimes startlingly successful European housing and planning have grown out of a political, economic, sociological and cultural base that has no parallel in the United States. It is the product of a place, system and state of mind that are alien to the American way of life. Its lesson are legion, but they can be weighed only against what American society can absorb and achieve.